

Ellis Parker Butler

The
Behind
Legs
of the
'Orse



THE
BEHIND LEGS
OF THE
'ORSE

Ellis Parker Butler

THOUSANDS have enjoyed Ellis Parker Butler's books: 'Pigs is Pigs,' 'Philo Gubb,' 'Jibby Jones,' etc.

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Illustrated by Kleber Hall

THE BEHIND LEGS OF THE 'ORSE



ELLIS PARKER BUTLER



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THE BEHIND LEGS OF THE 'ORSE
And Other Stories



WHEN IT CLIMBED OVER THE FENCE AND SAT DOWN BESIDE
LITTLE RED RIDING-HOOD ONLY OUR STRONG RIB CONSTRUC-
TION SAVED US FROM A LAUGHING DEATH (*page 10*)

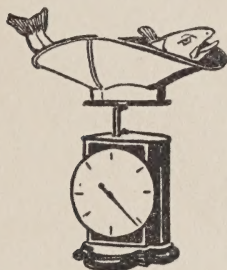
THE BEHIND LEGS OF THE 'ORSE

And Other Stories

BY

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

AUTHOR OF 'PIGS IS PIGS,' 'HOW IT FEELS TO BE FIFTY,'
'SWATTY,' ETC.



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TO
JEAN AND MARJORIE

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THE BEHIND LEGS OF THE 'ORSE

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NOT much of a story, perhaps, but possibly something about art. Not that art or artists are of much moment, either. But here it is, for what it is worth — take it or leave it! It is about an artist — and, I believe, a great artist.

I met this great artist one evening at Car-gay's, who likes to have affairs of one sort or another in his studio and makes enough magazine-cover money to afford them. For purposes of identification you may call me Henry Rodman, although that is not my name. I am in the button business — domestic and imported pearl buttons — and people call me a millionaire, but whether I am or am not is nobody's business but my own. I ought not to mention it here, perhaps, but I have a brother William who was always the black sheep of our family, and with the coming of prohibition he got into the bootleg business, and he is the only boot-

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legger I would trust for a minute. I do trust William, and I have a right to, because he is my brother. I only mention this because, in spite of the fact that I have a wife, I know quite well that the only reason Cargay invites me to so many of his studio affairs is because I can get him a little dependable refreshment through my brother William.

However that may be, I can say I do enjoy Cargay's affairs. I don't mix with the crowds there much; I've been in the button business enough years to have some common sense and I know I'm not invited to Cargay's because I'm bright, and I know I'm supposed to be well enough satisfied to sit around and listen and maybe say a word or two when some one drops into a chair alongside of me and speaks first.

My wife is one of the real ones. She belongs, as they say. You wouldn't know her by the name of Mrs. Henry Rodman, but you would by the name of Bessie Bartol in a minute. They don't have to say, 'This is Bessie Bartol, the great eccentric dancer,' when they introduce Bessie; they need only say, 'This is Bessie Bartol.' But when they introduce me, they are

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apt to say, 'This is Henry Rodman; Bessie Bartol's husband, you know.' I don't mind; I'm well-enough satisfied to let it be that way. Yes!

Well, this Pierre fellow I met up there at Cargay's one night — oh, several years ago! I'd seen him before, if you could call it seeing him, several times — four times, I guess. In the 'Vive la République' show. It was the big hit — but you know all about that. It came over from Paris — queerest, quaintest show that was ever put on. A whale of a hit, and due to run forever it seemed.

In one way the show was all one man — Doucet. I met Doucet once or twice, a fat little man, all belly and pop-eyes and pudgy face and a big grin. He said, 'Ze "Vive la République" ees all one beeg family,' or something of the sort, and I guess it was — with Doucet for the iron-handed papa. He was a genius, but just as a poet genius has to be cruel to words and grab them by the throat until they turn blue in the face and mean something they never meant before, so Doucet had to be an iron nut-cracker and murder his troupe if it did

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not get his exact shade of artistry. A wonderful show papa; a wonderful man! He could spank his company into shape with a club, and they worshiped him for making them be great artists.

I don't know what they would call the 'Vive la République' in France, but over here we might call it 'Mother Goose for Grown-ups,' or 'Nursery Rimes Made Wonderful.' Simple, but made into wonderful art.

So, this particular night, Doucet came up to Cargay's, and when every one had dipped into the punch made of my brother William's material, Cargay led Doucet to the front and said there was no need to introduce him, this was Doucet. Doucet made one of his funny little talks, and then he said:

'Zis evening I have brotch wis me one of my artists, a vair great artist, who will amoos you. You 'ave all see 'eem, but you 'ave not recognize 'eem. In "Vive la République" he ees ze bush on wheech ze tails of Little Bo-Peep's sheeps do hang, and he ees Zhack ze Giant-Keeler. Meester Pierre Rochambeau!'

Well, a little man, not up to my shoulder,

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got up and bowed to the right and to the left, and to the right and to the left again, and every one applauded, and the little man kept on bowing until Doucet snapped his fingers. Then the little man — this Pierre Rochambeau — went to the piano.

Without trying to think up good descriptive words, I should say he looked like a rat — a white-faced rat with a drawn, worried face. He was dapper and Frenchy and all that, of course — patent-leather shoes, and a white line along his vest V, and wonderful long white fingers — but he did look like a worried little rat. I felt sorry for him. He made me think of a blind half-witted boy some man had beaten until he has learned to play the piano wonderfully and was being made to show off.

But the minute Pierre touched the piano, you forgot all that. He sat on the stool with his back to the keyboard and hunched himself over and shriveled up. His gums sank in and he became one hundred years old — he was a toothless old peasant. Then he put one hand behind him and hit one key of the piano. One note, but you saw a thousand years of peas-

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antry raising its dull head and listening to the first note of a happy little peasant dance tune. And then, without arising from that piano-stool, without turning toward the piano, Pierre sang and danced and played. He was a whole company of peasants swinging in a hilarious grand right-and-left, and all the while he was this hundred-year-old ancient man dancing stiff-legged, feeling rheumatism in every joint and not giving a hang! I don't know how many times he reached back to hit the piano-keys — probably not six times — but it seemed as if the piano were talking all the time. It ended with the old peasant grasping his old wife and doing a wild jig for a moment, and then the old fellow was all rheumatism and aches and pains again, and there was rat-faced Pierre sitting on the piano-stool and looking up at Doucet's fat face like a child awaiting orders.

We applauded for five minutes and Pierre sat emotionless and Doucet beamed. Doucet snapped his fingers and nodded. Pierre arose and bowed.

'Eef you pleece,' he said, 'leetle girl and her

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mama ees not like when dog makes fight with chat.'

He was the dog; he was the cat; he was the little girl; he was the mamma; he was the fight! He seemed to speak a thousand words a minute, and he made the piano talk also. At times the dog, the cat, the little girl and the mamma were all talking at once! The neighbors came in; the whole village came in; the firemen and the gendarmes and the priest and the local contingent of the army came in. Every one was mad, wild, excited; we were mad, wild, excited. And Pierre, when you looked at him, was wilder, madder, more excited than all of us together. Wonderful! Wonderful! No American could have done it; not in a thousand years. And the next minute Pierre was sitting there quietly, looking up at Doucet, waiting for a snap of the fingers. Doucet's head shook a negative; Pierre arose and bowed, looked for a vacant chair, and came and sat beside me. Doucet bowed and bowed; bowed as he took his hat and went to the door with Cargay; bowed as he backed out of the door. Every one came and spoke to Pierre, saying he was wonderful; then

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something else in the way of entertainment began.

'That was great,' I said to Pierre. 'You are a genius. I wouldn't have missed hearing you for five hundred dollars. That's real art.'

'I try to be real artist,' Pierre said.

'And so you are Jack the Giant-Killer and the bush!'

'And also ze behind legs of ze 'orse,' said Pierre. 'Ze bush — poof! Ze giant-keeler — poof! But ze behind legs of ze 'orse — ah! Yes, I am artist. Zeese leetle song — poof! Nossing! But, monsieur, ze behind legs of ze 'orse requires ze great art. You 'ave notice 'eem?'

I had not, as a matter of fact, but I told him I had. I had noticed the horse as a whole, of course, as every one did who saw the 'Vive la République' show. An amazingly humorous horse! It danced, it walked, it lay down and got up again. People held their sides and choked with laughter when the horse walked across the stage; and when it climbed over the fence and sat down beside Little Red Riding-Hood only our strong rib construction saved

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us from a laughing death. But I had not noticed the hind legs particularly. In the programme due credit was given to the horse thus:

The Horse. (Fore Legs).....GEORGES BARBEAU

The Horse. (Hind Legs)...PIERRE ROCHAMBEAU

We were left alone in our corner of the studio, Pierre and I. He had done his 'stunt'; I was only Henry Rodman, button-dealer, husband of Bessie Bartol, brother of Bill the Bootlegger, owner of a dinner-jacket. I looked at the little fellow. He reminded me of a dried pea. I could not judge his age at all; I have seen world-hardened youths of twenty who looked as young and wiry old men of sixty who looked as old. I could not make him out, this Pierre. He turned to me.

'You are artist?' he asked.

'Me? No,' I said. 'But I like it — I like art. Very much! I can see you are a great artist — wonderful! I can see that. The way you sang to-night, and the way you do the bush, and the way you do Jack the Giant-Killer ——'

'Ah!' he said, raising his shoulders and

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spreading his hands, as if I had said something unkind that he must bear patiently. 'Always I hear that same! I sing! I am bush! I am Zhack! I am wonderful! And of where I am great artist — nossing! Of the child tricks, everybody speak — of the great art, nobody speak! M'sieu,' and he tapped himself on the chest, 'I, Pierre Rochambeau, are ze greatest behind legs of ze 'orse ze world has ever see!'

You can see that I can't keep up this lingo of his. I can't write it as he said it, anyway, so it does not matter. The thing that matters is the earnestness of the little man — the honest sincerity of him. I hope you get that. He told me all about it as we sat there. I am a good listener — wives' husbands are, you know.

It seems that the little man's life ambition had been to be the hind legs of a horse. Back there in France, when he was a knee-high boy, his father had been a butcher — a horse-meat butcher. There was a large pen where the horses were put until they were needed — all the old wrecks and ruins the buyers gathered up — and they were very amusing. They made one laugh, Pierre said.

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'Always I am ze 'orse,' he explained. 'I make ze trot, I make ze gallop, I am ze w'ite 'orse and I am ze beeg black 'orse and I am ze so sleepy 'orse. My papa laugh, my mamma laugh. I am call Little 'Orse.'

Then one day some sort of show came to town with a horse in it — a burlesque horse made of burlap with one man inside for the fore legs and one for 'ze behind legs of ze 'orse.' His father gave him a franc and Pierre went to the show. He was all eagerness and excitement and could hardly sit on his bench until the horse came on the stage.

'When I see that 'orse, I am seek,' he said. 'I am disgust. I am feel the shame.'

It was a miserably poor exhibition, from what Pierre said. Not like a real horse. Any one would have known it was nothing but two clowns in a burlap.

It made him sick, but it gave him a great ambition. He felt that he must give the world a horse that would be heart-breakingly funny but the truest art. He was overwhelmed by the thought that there might be thousands of burlesque imitation horses on the stages of

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the world and not one actor in any one of them who was artist enough to know and appreciate and show the true amusingness of the horse.

'Ze clown, he think of ze head of ze 'orse,' Pierre said. 'Roll ze eye, wiggle ze ear, open ze mouth, rise up ze hoof and scratch ze nose! Poof! Chape! Eet ees not art, that! Eet ees monkey-business!'

He could do all that, he said. Any cheap burlesquer could do that. Even a fellow like Georges Barbeau could manage the head and fore legs of a horse well enough to make an audience laugh.

'But ze behind legs of ze 'orse — ah!'

There, if you were an artist — a true artist — was everything! If you knew the horse and studied the horse and were a great artist, you saw that in the 'behind legs' were all the character and humor and gentle nuance of the horse nature. The fore legs could be enacted trickily — as our host Cargay did his magazine-covers, Pierre suggested — but to 'do' the 'behind legs' one must be a master, like a Corot or a Liszt or a Daudet.

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'Like Michelangelo or Paganini or Balzac,' I suggested.

'Ah — prrrt!' exclaimed Pierre scornfully. 'Michelangelo! Paganini! Balzac! Beeg? Yes! But crude, m'sieu! Raw! Unfeenish! Me, I am take ze tip end of ze hair — one hair! — and cut heem in four and carve heem so exquisite ze real artist see and weep of joy! Me, I study those 'orse, I study those behind leg, I study those muscle and those bone, I study those uplift and down-go of those leg, I study twent' year how those 'orse lift up hees hoofs and how those 'orse put down those hoofs. I am great artist, m'sieu!'

He had 'beeg tronkful of those artist pictures of 'orse,' he said, and he studied them day and night. '*Toujours* I see heem, those behind legs of 'orse,' Pierre said. He knew the exact difference between the way a full-bred Percheron pulled its hoof out of the mud and the way a half-bred Percheron pulled its hoof out of the mud. He knew the exact difference between the way a twenty-year-old cab-horse lifted its hoof and the way a twenty-one-year-old cab-horse lifted its hoof. He knew how a horse

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walked across a sandy plowed field and how it walked across the same field at the end of the season, after the crop had been harvested. All this he put into his rendition of the 'behind legs' in 'Vive la République.'

'Those Georges!' he exclaimed.

His scorn for Georges Barbeau, who was no artist at all but a fellow who thought of nothing but flirtations and food and wine, was vast.

'He has no art, heem!' Pierre told me. 'Eef he attain the laugh, he is satisfy. He ees horrible!'

Georges, it seemed, knew nothing of the horse. If Doucet had unexpectedly, some night, brought out a mule-skin or a donkey-skin, it would have been all the same to Georges. He would have clambered in without a protest and he would have performed the mule or the donkey exactly as he performed the horse. Pierre could not have done that! He would have refused to enter the costume.

'I am not donkey; I am not mule,' he said. 'I, Pierre Rochambeau, am ze behind legs of ze 'orse!'

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The World War had been a blow to Pierre at first. It seemed to him a cruel waste of time to go saving a world, when art called him to the finer task of exemplifying the nice differences of various 'behind legs' of horses. He had felt that his career was being unkindly wrecked. But the war had had its compensations; he had studied horses — artillery horses — and he had learned things about hind-leg action that otherwise would have been impossible: a horse head-down in a shell-hole and kicking, for example. And he had met Doucet there.

Doucet's 'Vive la République' was built on the hind legs of the horse, Pierre told me. In the trenches one day, Pierre had talked to Doucet of art and had illustrated by showing Doucet how the hind legs of a horse should be acted, and Doucet had conceived then and there the idea of 'Vive la République.' He had picked up Georges and trained the poor block-head to be the fore legs of a horse. He, Doucet, had given an exhibition behind the lines for the soldiers. Doucet had added this and that. Doucet had built up 'Vive la République' there and had remade and rebuilt it after the

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war. But all on the hind legs, you understand.

And Doucet knew, Pierre told me, that the whole show still hung on the hind legs. The hind legs were the cornerstone of the show, the solid foundation of art on which it rested. Audiences came, critics came and all exclaimed at the marvelous art of 'Vive la République,' but none but Doucet had the brains to see that without Pierre Rochambeau in the 'behind legs of those 'orse' the vital spark of art would be missing. He was the touchstone, was Pierre. So Pierre told me. Because he was near to perfection, the other members of the company felt the urge of art and amounted to something — not so much, but something.

'I know how it is, Mr. Rochambeau,' I told the serious little man. 'I know what art is. I'm in the button business myself, and I buy and sell buttons — pearl buttons. But when I see a perfect pearl button I — well, my heart is happy. You understand? I want to throw up the whole buying and selling business and get me a little cutting-machine and just do nothing but make buttons — perfect pearl buttons, absolutely perfect pearl buttons —

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better and better buttons all the time — and keep them!’

‘You are artist!’ Pierre cried, and grasped my hand.

‘Well, I guess everybody feels that way once in a while,’ I said. ‘The woman who makes a perfect cake and the bookkeeper who finishes a perfect ledger page. We’d all have that feeling if we weren’t so damn busy all the time.’

But Pierre wouldn’t have it that way. He seemed to think the world was almost bare of real artists nowadays. He said he knew of only three: he was one and I was another and there was one more — a lady. That started him again, and he told me he had all his life avoided the ladies. His art was too important. He could not afford to give one thought to the ladies, for that one thought would have been stolen from his art; his ‘behind legs of those ’orse’ would have suffered. It might have been different if he had met a kindred soul — a lady with an art as great as his own — but that had never been. Until now!

Until now! He had for years thought it impossible, but he had met a lady who, he was

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sure, could appreciate a great artist. Here in America, too! A great artist herself — the only other great artist in the world! He was very happy, and very miserable, but perhaps — Who knows?

'Au revoir, m'sieu! Eet ees to be hope we meet again!'

The affair was breaking up and I got up and shook hands with Pierre and moved over near Cargay, in case he had any message to send to brother William, and then hunted up my wife's wraps and we went home. That was Sunday, of course, and the next night I went to see 'Vive la République' again; I went to see the 'behind legs of those 'orse,' I should say. I'm ashamed to say I could not make much out of them. The fore end of the horse was as funny as a box of monkeys, but I could not see that the hind legs did anything but follow the front end of the horse around, as they had to, being sewed in the same sack, as you might say.

I was sorry. I hoped that, possibly, Pierre might have been sick that night and some understudy doing the hind legs, but I did not believe it. I knew the little man was there, his

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back bent and his hands on Georges Barbeau's back, his legs walking here and there, his feet lifting and putting down the hoofs, his legs going through ridiculous clowning contortions; but I could not see the great art in it. But I'm only a button merchant. You have to learn a lot of these things, like Browning and Ibsen and that fellow who paints that queer stuff everybody is so crazy about. I went back to see Pierre and told him he was wonderful and talked with him while I hung around waiting for my wife. She does a dance following the 'Vive la République' numbers. She's good, too. Wonderful!

So I got into the habit of dropping into Pierre's room while he got rid of his make-up. We talked a lot, like a couple of Dutch uncles. He was improving all the time, he told me. He had been studying American horses and had introduced some American-horse changes into his hind-leg impersonation. He thought he felt a response from the audiences, he said.

'But how about Georges?' I asked him. 'Won't it be odd, sort of, if Georges goes right ahead being the front end of a French horse

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while you are the hind legs of an American horse?'

'Ah! you forget ze great art!' Pierre exclaimed. 'Those front parts of those 'orse are for ze trash, for ze thickheads, for ze crowd. Those crowd ha-ha at those front end of 'orse, like fools, but ze artist souls know ze great art, they are touch by ze great art of Pierre Rochambeau, they see those behind legs only, m'sieu. It is for ze art soul Pierre do those behind legs.'

That was all right, too. Me, I'm not an artist, as I said before, so I could not appreciate those 'behind legs of those 'orse,' but I got an idea that probably the real folks — the artists who won medals and so forth — did see the bigness of Pierre's fine artistry. No man could be as serious about it as Pierre was, I felt, without having the genuine art article in his soul. I did admire the little man, studying his horses and his books.

He came off the stage one night quite excited. He had found, after all these years, the one who was able to appreciate his art — one who was great enough in art to know and recog-

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nize great art. He could feel, he said, their hearts leap together and embrace. He was tremendously uplifted and almost incoherent. For weeks he had been practicing a new quiver of the fetlock joint as he lifted the left hind hoof. He had seen one horse quiver thus — a horse of some thirty years of age. The quiver represented age and weariness and muscular deterioration, and it was very difficult to portray, Pierre said, but he had seen in the eyes of the Wonderful One as he came off stage that she had seen and appreciated.

At last, he told me eagerly, he had found the heart and the artist soul at whose feet he could lay his art. He had found the Wonderful One worthy of his love. Now, he said, he could begin to live; now he would be inspired to greater efforts, to finer art.

He would, he told me, take the Wonderful One and return to France. Dear France understood art as America could not. Dear France would understand the art of the Wonderful One as America did not and it would welcome Pierre and the Wonderful One.

'She is great artist,' Pierre said, 'but she is

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so great artist she will wish to give all for Pierre. In dear France she will be those front part of 'orse. Doucet? Pah! Contract? Pah! America? Pah!'

I gathered that he meant to take her by the hand, this Wonderful One, and fly to Paris. He had not said a word to her yet, but that was all right — Art would fly to Art. I suggested that perhaps the Wonderful One might have ties, but Pierre scoffed at ties. His art would beckon and she would come. He would instruct her; she was a true artist; in four months or five months she would be a perfect fore part of a horse.

As he talked he let his excited brain build his cloud castle. He would build a show around the 'orse' — he would call it "'Rah for America!' Paris would be wild about it — London — New York — some time in the future, South America!

For a week or two I listened to Pierre's eagerness. No, he had not spoken to the Wonderful One; it was not necessary — the heart of an artist spoke to the heart of an artist without words. She understood! Her eyes spoke!

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I was a little doubtful about this, but, being in the button business, I may have become a little too much inclined toward wanting contracts written out in black and white. I did tell my wife about Pierre and asked her if she had seen anything to indicate that his soul-mate was ready and willing, but she had noticed nothing. She had no idea who the Wonderful One might be. She said she would keep her eyes open and let me know.

I think the money offered by Magnet Films was more than Doucet could withstand. At any rate, the figure I heard was an even million dollars, with a percentage added, and 'Vive la République' was duly filmed. There was a private showing in the little Gold-Drop Theater, and as Bessie had half a dozen tickets, I was one of the favored ones. I was standing in the lobby when Pierre entered the theater and he stopped to press my hand; had we been in Paris he would have kissed my cheek, I suppose. He was quite excited — quite trembling with excitement.

'You come to see ze cinema — yes?' he bubbled. 'I too, m'sieu. Imagine, it is ze first

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time that Pierre Rochambeau see Pierre Rochambeau in those behind legs of those 'orse! I geef myself those great treat to-day, yes? And more, m'sieu: To-day I shall speak to ze Wonderful One. This may be au revoir, m'sieu! Ah — one minute.'

He darted across the lobby and I saw him bow low in his fur-collared coat to Doucet and Mademoiselle Martin and Bessie.

'So that's how it goes, is it? Ma'mselle Martin is the Wonderful One, is she? There are no flies on Pierre; he knows an artist when he sees one.'

My estimate of Pierre's good sense revised itself right there. Artist soul might or might not speak to artist soul, but the quaint, clever, tricky Mademoiselle Martin would certainly be able to put joy and humor into the fore part of that horse if any one could. I sat through the seven reels of 'Vive la République' and judged that it would be something of a failure in New York and a tremendous success outside of New York. In the lobby I waited for Bessie, but when she came she was with the 'Vive la République' crowd and they were going across

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the street for a supper — 'on Doucet,' as she told me — but I begged off. I told her I would go on home and send the car back, but she said she could pick up a cab and not to bother.

Bessie came in between twelve and one and tossed her wraps on a chair. She came and stood beside me.

'Henry,' she said.

'Yes? What is it?' I asked, looking up at her.

'I don't know just how I want to say it,' she said, pulling off her gloves. 'It is — perhaps it is a favor I want to ask you. It is about Pierre — Pierre Rochambeau, the little Frenchman ——'

'The "behind legs of those 'orse,"' I smiled. 'Yes, go on!'

'He's coming to you to apologize,' Bessie said. 'He has been making eyes at me for quite a while — as dozens do, you know — and tonight he spoke to me. He asked me to elope with him.'

'By George!'

'No; wait! Don't laugh, please,' Bessie continued. 'Wait till I am through. He was quite

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serious. He said he and I were the only two real artists in the world. He said artist soul spoke to artist soul and he knew I understood. He said I was the only artist worthy to be his companion. He asked me to go to France with him ——'

'And be the fore part of the horse!' I chortled.

Bessie seated herself on the edge of a chair and smoothed her gloves against her knee.

'Yes,' she said quite soberly, 'and be the fore part of the horse.'

'But, my Heavens, Bess!' I cried. 'You don't mean you would?'

'What nonsense!' She smiled, and I was reassured. 'No; it isn't that, Henry. It is that I like Pierre ——'

'So do I,' I said.

'And I'd hate to have him made ridiculous, for he is an artist,' she continued. 'He said all this — made this proposal — when we were in the box before the film was run off. I wanted to laugh at him, but I didn't, Henry. He was so serious; it seemed to mean so much to him. So I told him I was honored, but that I couldn't

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— I was American, and so forth, and couldn't. And I happened to mention you. He had not guessed that you were my husband.'

'By George!' I exclaimed again.

'So this is what I want to ask, Henry,' Bessie said. 'He is coming to apologize to you and beg your pardon. I think he may think you will want to fight him, or something. He thinks he has stained your honor, quite unintentionally, but that you are entitled to redress.'

'And you don't want me to beat up the little fellow?' I asked. 'I won't. You don't think I would take him seriously, do you?'

'But that's just what I want you to do,' Bessie said. 'Beat him up, if you want to, but don't laugh at him! Just — take him seriously. Won't you, please? For he is an artist — a great artist.'

'Madame,' I said, 'it shall be as you wish. I will be firm but kind with those "behind legs of those 'orse!"'

I asked her when Pierre expected to see me.

'He is coming now,' she said. 'I told him

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to let me see you first — that I might be able to calm you.'

'Well, I'm mighty sleepy to be sternly dignified,' I said, 'but I'll do my best. Was he at the supper?'

'No, poor little man!' Bessie said, meaning Pierre.

He came ten or fifteen minutes later and I cut short a yawn and tried to look the indignant husband. 'Well?' I demanded as he entered, and I tried to make the word stingingly harsh, although I am not much good at that sort of thing.

Pierre's hand trembled as he put his gloves and hat and cane on the table. Then he turned his face toward me and looked up into my eyes. I don't know whether he was trying to be brazen or manly or what, but he failed. He stood a moment in his elegant coat with the fur collar, like something in a French triangle play, but as he looked up at me his face began to twitch and his lips to quiver and the tears flooded his eyes. For just a moment he was the lover facing the irate husband, and the next moment he clapped his hands to his face and

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dropped into a chair, crumpled and sobbing — nothing but a poor little tyke of a broken-hearted Frenchman. And sobbed! And did not do a confounded thing but sob!

I heard Bessie's heels hit the floor as she swung to a sitting position on the couch, and she was on her knees beside Pierre quite as quickly as I was able to clap a friendly hand on his shoulder, for I have never seen a man break down so utterly. A child cries so, sometimes, over a broken toy.

'Pierre, don't!' Bessie was begging, and I was saying 'Come, now, brace up!' or something of the sort. It must have been fifteen minutes before the little rat of a man dared take his hands from his face, and then he showed a face in which nothing but utterly hopeless misery had a place. Bessie wiped his face with her handkerchief.

'What is it, Pierre? What is the matter?' she asked, good scout that she is. For a full minute or more he stared at the floor.

'I have see!' he said then. 'I onderstand! I am complete fool, me! You were most kind,' he said to Bessie. 'You say you have hosband

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and you cannot leave heem. You were most kind to these miserable Pierre; you have not tol' heem he is not artist.'

'But Pierre!' Bessie cried. 'You are! You are a great artist!'

'No!' he said, with that short, sharp French negative. 'I have see! I have been beeg fool! I have been have those swell head! I have been theenk I am artist, and I am bom artist. I am no-good artist. I am poonk!' And to me he said: 'I am not worth the keek!'

He arose and gathered up his hat and cane and gloves.

'Since I am leetle boy,' he said, 'I theenk I am great artist of those 'orse; I theenk I am wonderful. I laugh at those Georges Barbeau. I theenk I am greatest artist in whole worl'. I am proud. I ask you to go away with Pierre Rochambeau because you are great artist and I am great artist. But to-night, first time, I see those Pierre Rochambeau in those behind legs of those 'orse!'

He made a gesture that indicated that Pierre Rochambeau in the hind legs of that horse was ignorant poor trash and no artist at all.

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'I am no good!' he said. 'I am to those Georges Barbeau like one spoil egg to the beeg banquet of art!'

He walked to the door.

'But Pierre! Wait!' Bessie called. 'Where are you going? What are you going to do?'

'Me — I go back to my France and study those behind legs of those 'orse ten, twenty year. Au revoir!'

The door closed behind him. I looked at Bessie and grinned, but she did not smile.

'Bess,' I said, 'do you think he will actually quit Doucet and go back to France?'

My wife looked at me with surprise.

'Why, of course!' she said. 'He is an artist, isn't he?'

THE REFORMATION OF UNCLE BILLY



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THE REFORMATION OF UNCLE BILLY

'LYIN' is lyin', be it about fish or money,' remarked Deacon Abner dogmatically, 'an' is forbid by Scriptor, an' he can't be saved an' freed from sin till he does stop lyin'. That's all there is to it. Billy Matison's got to give up fish-lyin', or he won't never git into the kingdom.'

'Well, I reckon you're right, deacon,' said Stet; 'but it ought to be some excuse for Billy that he don't harm no one by his lyin'. Seems to me a lie ain't rightly a lie unless it ketches somebody. Ef you lie about a hoss you're tradin', I'll admit that's wrong, 'cause you'd do the other feller dirt; but Billy's lyin' don't fool nobody, an' it don't cost nobody nothin'. An' then you'd ought to be easy on him, seein' how long he's been at it. Wl'y, Billy Matison's been lyin' 'bout fish off an' on for nigh sixty year, an' reg'lar, summer an' winter, for

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the hull time, at that. Now I leave it to you, deacon; it ain't easy to break off short.'

They were sitting in front of Billings' grocery. All were gray-haired men nearing the end of their lives, and all were members of the First Church. So was Billy, but his one sin cast a doubt in the minds of his friends regarding his salvation. Billy did not worry in the least. His regular daily occupation was to fish from the bridge across the river, and there he would sit day after day, catching nothing, or at least very little. But in the evening, among his cronies before the grocery, he told marvelous tales of the fish he had almost landed, of the big bass he had caught; and when the fishing season ended, and the rendezvous was the stove in the grocery, all these tales were retold, while it was observed that they had grown strangely during their period of desuetude.

Billy was such a genial, whole-souled liar about his fish that no one had ever had the heart to suggest the improbability of his tales; but a revival had taken place in the village, and under the fervid words of the evangelist the old men had been brought to a

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full realization of not only their own, but Billy's sins; and the deacon had resolved that Billy must be saved in spite of himself.

'No,' admitted the deacon; 'it ain't easy to break off short, but it's got to be done. Billy's got to be saved. We know his sin, ef he don't, an' knowin' a sin an' not doin' our best to stop it 'mounts to the same as ef it was our sin, an' I ain't goin' to everlastin' fire jest because Billy Matison lies about the fish he don't ketch.'

'That sentiment does you proud, deacon,' said Hiram, a weak-eyed old man with a thin white goatee; 'you do yourself proud. That's lovin' your neighbor as yourself.'

The deacon felt the delicate flattery, and puffed his pipe in silence a moment, lest he seem puffed up by the compliment.

'Billy Matison has got to be brung up short,' he said, at length; 'he's gittin' old, an' no tellin' when he will drop off. He's got to be cured now an' at once.'

Ephraim had been thoughtfully pushing kilikinick into his brier with his thumb. He struck a match on his trousers and puffed the tobacco into a glow.

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The deacon opened his mouth again. 'Billy Matison has ——' he said.

'It's a pity,' said Ephraim, interrupting him, 'we can't let him break off gradual. When you come to think how long Billy has told fish lies, it seems like the shock of quittin' right sudden might be too much for him — might make him sick, or kill him, mebby. Now, if he could sort o' taper off like — say, ketch one less fish a day for a week, or drop off half an inch a day from the size — it might let him down easy an' not try his constitution so bad.'

'It would be easier on Billy,' said Hiram.

The deacon thought deeply for a minute.

'Jest so,' he said: 'mebby it might strain him to give up all his lyin' at one time, seein' he takes so much pride in it, an' mebby we ought to be a leetle easy on him. Ef Billy Matison was a young feller it would be best, but we can't risk his dyin' unsaved. No; we got to git him to give it up right now. Now is the app'inted time.'

'It'll be mortal hard on Billy, come winter,' said Amos. 'I 'low Billy won't know how to spend the winter ef he can't lie some.'

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Hiram shook his head sadly.

'I doubt,' he said, 'ef Billy can live out the winter ef he don't lie. Fish-lyin's got to be all he does winters.'

The deacon had been thinking again, and did not catch this remark.

'There's one p'int we must be careful on,' he said: 'Billy's almighty touchy, an' we mustn't let on we think he's lyin'. You know how touchy he is, Hiram.'

'Thasso,' said Hiram. 'We can't let on we think he's lyin', he's so dum touchy. Ef we let on he was lyin', an' that we knew he was lyin', he'd go off mad an' never come nigh us.'

'An' then we would have a harder job, a big sight, to cure him,' said the deacon.

'But I don't see how we can git at him airy other way,' said Amos, 'for ef we don't let on we know he's lyin' we can't tell him not to lie .no more.'

'They's jest one way to do it,' said the deacon, 'an' that's the way it's got to be did. We got to make him take back what he lies. Ef he lies an' says he caught a big one, we got to make him tell the truth, an' we got to do

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it gentle, an' not let on he's lyin'. We got to ——'

Here the conversation paused, for around the livery-stable came Billy Matison, his fishing-pole slung over his shoulder, his bait and lunch-basket slung on the pole, and his cane in his hand. As he approached the group of old men, Billy did not appear a very energetic fisherman. His back was bent far forward, and his hand trembled as it held the pole. His cane was a necessity, and not an ornament. His wrinkled face was small, and appeared still smaller under the great home-made straw hat that rested on his long gray hair. He was an inoffensive, pale-eyed old man, and his toothless gums grasped a blackened clay pipe. Water stood in his eyes. Billy was seventy and 'showed his age.'

As he neared the group of old men, they arose. They were but little younger than Billy, and leaned on their canes for support. The straightest of them did not assume the perpendicular at once, but opened gradually from his stooping position, as if his joints had long had the rust of rheumatism.

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Billy tottered up to them, unsuspecting of their plot for the safety of his soul. When he reached them, he tremblingly swung his pole and basket to the walk, and sank on the plank bench with a sigh of relief.

Then he took his pipe from his mouth, and holding it out in his shaking hand for emphasis, said in his wavering voice:

‘Deacon, I ketched the biggest bass I ever see to-day. I’ll warrant it goes four pound.’

Amos glanced at Hiram with pity in his eyes. Of all Billy’s lies this was the greatest. But the deacon seated himself beside the fisherman, and putting one hand on Billy’s shoulder, said:

‘Billy, you an’ me has knowed each other forty year, an’ in all them years we been good friends, ain’t we?’

Billy turned slowly and gazed at the deacon. His lower jaw dropped weakly, as was its wont when he was surprised. Words failed him.

‘Ain’t we?’ insisted the deacon.

Billy replaced his pipe between his lips, and said simply, ‘Yes.’

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'An' you recollect how I helped you when you was courtin' 'Manthy? You'd never 'a' got her but for me, Billy.'

Billy's head shook a slow negative.

'An' how I lent you money to build a new house when yourn burned?'

Billy nodded. His eyes sought the faces of the group, but they were stern, and he could fathom nothing there.

'Billy,' continued the deacon, 'I'm goin' to ask a favor of you. It ain't much. Won't you say that mebbby that bass only weighs three pounds an' a half?'

'Well, mebbby it does,' Billy admitted.

'Well, won't you say three pounds?'

'That bass ——' began Billy, but the deacon interrupted him:

'For old friendship's sake, Billy. It's a special favor.'

A few more lines gathered in Billy's brow, but he nodded.

'Billy,' said the deacon, 'you remember the night I brought your boy Jim home when he got lost? Can't you make it two pounds for that?'

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Billy gazed doggedly at the plank walk. It was a hard struggle, but he nodded.

'You remember Gettysburg, Billy, an' how I carried you two mile? Can't you make it one pound for Gettysburg?'

Billy got up. He was trembling with something besides age now. It was anger.

'Deacon, you mean I'm lyin' ——'

'No, Billy,' said the deacon, soothingly; 'I don't. Mebby me an' Hiram's got a bet up. Gettysburg, Billy! Make it a pound for me an' Gettysburg.'

Billy leaned on his stick with both hands.

'It's — a — pound,' he said.

'An' now, Billy,' said the deacon, laying his hand on Billy's arm, while the old men gathered closer about him, 'you remember when your Mary Ann went — when she — she left home, an' you — when she visited us until you wanted her back? For that, Billy, won't you make it no fish at all? Won't you say you didn't ketch no fish at all to-day, Billy?'

Billy straightened up, and two large drops rolled from his eyes down the gutters of his cheeks.

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‘Deacon,’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t do it for no one but you, but for you an’ Mary Ann I didn’t ketch no fish to-day.’

For only one moment the deacon stood triumphant. Then each of the old men grasped Billy’s hand firmly, and trudged away, leaving Billy alone, wrapped up in his thoughts. The deacon and Hiram went away together, and the deacon said, ‘Hiram, it’s begun.’ That was enough.

And Billy! Half stunned, he stood gazing after them. He knew it all. He knew these old friends of his thought him a liar, and that they were trying to save him. Perhaps he should not have yielded, but the deacon had certainly been his best friend, and ——

A known liar! A notorious liar!

He picked up his basket with a sigh and slipped it from the pole. Then he painfully mounted the two steps into the grocery.

‘Billings,’ he said, as he placed the basket on the counter and raised the lid, ‘I ketched a big bass to-day; want you to weigh it.’

Billings took the fish from the basket and

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dropped it into the tin scoop, where it fell with a slap. He pushed the weight along until the beam swayed evenly.

‘Four pound, two ounces,’ he said.

HINCMAR THE PEACEMAKER



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FOR three hours the queen, locked in her own chambers, had shrieked in a mad hysteria, her ladies standing helpless and distraught and not daring to touch hand to her, even to disrobe the poor creature. Indeed it had been necessary to batter in the heavy door when Hilduin came at the king's request. Now the mad shrieks had quieted and the physician came from the queen's apartments. He found King Hincmar seated in his great chair, sad and worried withal, but gazing out of the eastern window with a face still obstinately set.

'Speak, physician,' said the king, 'how do you find the queen, my lady?'

The sun was low in the west. At dawn had come Duke Charles's messenger telling of the new uprising of Lothair the Black and calling on Hincmar to play the part of a faithful ally, bidding him gather his men and mount and ride without delay. Joy had filled the heart of Hincmar the Warmaker at the word. For a

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year no blood of foe had stained his sword and he was hungry for battle. For a full year, and the only year since he had been old enough to sit astride a steed, Hincmar had idled at home and he was full weary of the idleness and ashamed as well, for why are men made but to do battle with foes and, if there be no foes, to make them?

War, and if war fled before him, murder and rapine, were the birthright of Hincmar the Warmaker as they had been the inheritance of his father before him. For war he had been reared and taught, and to the wars he brought cunning and skill and rough bravery and his banner had yet to know defeat. Onslaught, battle and fray were meat and drink to him; they were his day's work and his recreation; his work and his play. Ten times he had led his men against Black Lothair; thrice he had waged war against Duke Charles; twice he had gone to fight the Turks. War followed war, for war was the game and the candle to Hincmar the Warmaker.

His beard was tawny, like the mane of a lion, and his eye was blue and clear and he

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stood a half head taller than the tallest of his men. A beardless boy could with difficulty lift the battle-axe that Hincmar swung like a toy. He was broad of shoulder and iron muscled and he rode like a centaur. His steed had need to be large and strong to bear up the weight of Hincmar and his armor.

So it was that the king could almost have loved Black Lothair since Black Lothair lived but to war against Duke Charles, seeking to throw off a thralldom he deemed unjust, and Duke Charles — busy with his wars to west and south — counted upon his ally Hincmar whenever Lothair the Black could gather together a troop sufficient to warrant him in again raising the banner of revolt. For Hincmar lived for war and war, most often, meant war with Lothair the Black.

It was after his latest war with Black Lothair that King Hincmar, returning in triumph, had wed the lady Bertha, and for a year he had lain idle, playing — as well as so rough a warrior could — at love, but growing each week less patient of such student's business and more eager to hear again the battle shouts and to

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see his sword shatter the helmets of strong men. Therefore it was he greeted the messenger of Duke Charles with a shout of joy, while the queen stood pale and trembling.

‘You will not go?’ she begged. ‘We have been wed so short a while. Ah, my lord, are you so eager to leave me?’

‘For a year I have been idling here like a lady’s page,’ he said. ‘Go? Truly I shall go! Lothair is up once more — Duke Charles has sent for me. Ho! Ralph! my armor!’

‘But, dear my lord!’ begged the queen. ‘Why should you battle against Lothair? The quarrel is not thine. Let Duke Charles fight his own fights, and stay you with me, for I am all thine.’

‘What do women know of war?’ scoffed the king. ‘I go!’

Thus, back and forth, they had it, the king fretting that he must delay to argue with a woman and yet loth to depart with his lady in tears, and she all the while the more importunate that he stay as she found him firm set upon going. By this means each grew the more vexed until at last the king stormed and made

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to run from the room, upon which the queen fell in a swoon out of which she had no sooner come than she plunged into such a series of hysterics as bade fair to leave her a raving maniac. It was then the king sent Ralph hot haste to the camp where Duke Charles lay waiting, to beg the duke to send his good physician Hilduin that, if possible, the queen's reason and life might be saved. Now, therefore, as the sun was setting, and the queen was at last quieted, the physician came to the king to bring him tidings.

'Speak, physician,' said the king, 'how do you find the queen my lady?'

'May I be seated, sire?' asked the physician and, as the king inclined his head, sat in the oaken chair at his side where but late the queen had sat. He was a man of many years, this Hilduin, with a long white beard that shone like frost against the black velvet of his gown. As was meet he had removed his tall, conical hat when entering the presence of the king, and he put this on the floor now, dropping his leathern bag of simples beside it. His pale and venerable countenance was in strange contrast

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to the ruddy face of the king, but they were men with greatness in common, the one owning the greatness of wisdom and the other the greatness of might.

‘Your lady, sire,’ said the physician, ‘is resting easily for the moment, having fallen into a slumber. Unfortunately an evil constellation rules the heavens to-day and ——’

‘I would not leave for the war without bidding her farewell,’ the king interrupted. ‘When she awakens ——’

‘Ah!’ said Hilduin, raising a protesting hand. ‘We must see what may be when she awakens. One so lymphatic as Her Majesty ——’

‘Is she then in danger of death?’ asked the king fiercely.

‘To-morrow, or the day after, I can speak with greater assurance,’ said the physician. ‘Her Majesty has had a shock.’

‘And a fool the chit is to be shocked, wedded to a man of war as she well knows she is,’ declared the king angrily. ‘I am a warrior and war I must.’

‘Doubtless! Doubtless!’ said the physician soothingly. ‘Yet you should not chafe under

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a slight delay. One day, or two, you must wait if you would know whether you are leaving a living or a dying woman, sire. Seek to bridle your impatience.'

'And why speak you to me thus?' cried the king in greater anger.

'I speak as a physician,' said Hilduin. 'The quick flushing of your already red countenance apprises me that you have hot humors in the blood which, wrought upon by impatience, are prone to curdle, causing a stagnation or, as I may say, a stoppage or ceasing of the functions of the brain and liver, as well as other organs that consume the blood. Hence the supply of blood doubles in the veins, and unless prompt cupping is had the over-great supply of blood thus caused presses into the head, flooding it and causing death.'

The king frowned.

'I know nothing of your physic talk,' he said impatiently. 'In words fit for a soldier's ears, what do you mean?'

'Apoplexy, sire,' said Hilduin. 'You must wait a day, or mayhap two, to learn the outcome of your queen's distemper and, unless

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you would invite an apoplexy, it were well to possess your soul in patience, avoiding fretfulness and anger. As for Her Majesty ——'

'Yes, what of her?' asked the king, seeking to calm his impatience as the physician advised.

'I have done what I could,' said Hilduin. 'To relieve the hysteric condition caused by the congelation of the lesser humors of the spleen which gave rise to the vapors that oppressed her brain I gave a draught composed of distilled poppy heads combined with scrapings from the wing of the larger field butterfly and with powdered bats' tongues to alleviate the fever. At the same time I bled her freely and, when she became calmer under this treatment, administered a restorative composed of equal parts of essence of rose-leaves and distilled evening dew, placing across her chest a plaster of macerated earthworms. Her women got her to bed and she now sleeps. To-night, when the moonlight counteracts the evil influence of the ruling constellation, I shall prepare the drugs for to-morrow's use, and to-morrow at sundown we may know whether the evil vapors

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have been absorbed into the spleen again or whether her majesty's brain has admitted them, giving rise to a fever in the cranium that must be fought slowly and with great care.'

'And I must sit and sweat here?' asked the king.

'Until to-morrow evening at sundown, at least, sire,' said Hilduin.

'By all the saints!' cried Hincmar. 'Now, I thank the stars that I was born a soldier and not a leech! Give me the life of breaking heads and slitting throats! When my battle-axe falls I need no full day to know whether my patient will live or die — he's dead! Thy blood must be water to permit thee to sit about a room, waiting while thy simples and drugs take effect, or to make sure they do not. Now, by St. Swithin! how wilt thou spend the morrow?'

'Most royally,' said the physician, and he smiled.

'Sitting in a chair!' scoffed the king.

'Nay,' said the physician, 'for I have brought my apprentice to do that for me. He is a trusty lad, and he will watch at your lady's bedside, observing her pulse, watching her

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breath and administering the remedies I shall leave ready to his hand, while I do that I have had in mind these many months.'

'Pore over some musty book?' said Hincmar.

'Nay,' said the physician, smiling again. 'You eat good bread in the castle here? And that bread is made of good, white flour? And the flour is ground by thy own miller at thy own mill? And the mill-wheel is turned by a brook that comes leaping down yonder mountain, now shrouded in darkness? Do you know that brook?'

'I know it is mine,' said the king.

'The Duke Charles is a good master,' said the physician, 'but his capital lies in a dull, flat land. These mountains produce something his fertile fields cannot produce.'

'Men!' cried the king, striking the arm of his chair a mighty blow. 'Strong, brave men! Men fit for real war!'

'No doubt,' said the physician, still smiling, 'but the fields of my master's dukedom produce no mean soldiers. It is something other that your mountains breed that pleases me.'

'Maids?' suggested the king.

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‘Trout,’ said the physician.

‘Trout!’ The king lay back in his great chair and laughed loud and long. He beat the arm of his chair. ‘Trout!’ he cried. ‘And you will sit all day to-morrow at table, eating trout? By Saint Agnes, give me good boar’s meat and you may have your trout! Eating trout by the day!’

‘Nay, not eating, catching,’ said the physician.

The king stopped in the middle of a guffaw. Amusement shone in his eyes.

‘But that is boy’s play,’ he said. ‘Ah, I know! You are seeking to make me forget my trouble. You are playing at jester for me.’

‘Nay, forsooth!’ declared the physician. ‘No more is it boy’s play than thy breaking of heads and slitting of throats, sire. Fighting is boy’s play and war is man’s work, and there is fishing and fishing. When my fly touches the water ——’

‘What!’ cried the king. ‘Do you go after fish, then, with a trained fly, as the falconers hunt with falcons? A mighty great fly must that be!’ and again he roared with laughter.

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‘It is neither a living fly, nor yet a dead fly,’ said the physician, glad to change the king’s humor. ‘I make my own flies.’

‘A riddle!’ cried the king merrily. ‘It is neither a dead fly nor a living fly and yet a leech makes it! I give up thy riddle, leech.’

‘It is a cunning imitation of a fly,’ said the physician. ‘For know you, sire, he that would catch trout with flies must study the trout and learn what fly the trout desires each day and each hour of the day. So the wily trout-fisher maketh a great variety of flies, like unto all the insects that hover above a pool from the time the sun first brings the little creatures of the air to life until the frost drives the last away. Each month, and each hour, the trout has appetite for one particular air-flutterer and he who fishes a new water must come with many flies or perchance he will miss the trout’s appetite altogether. I have known a gray hackle ——’

‘A what?’ asked the king.

‘A gray hackle,’ responded the physician, ‘a fly with a hackle of gray hairs and wings of gray hen’s feathers, to tempt the trout all day

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until the sun reached a certain spot in the heavens and thereafter not a fish would glance at it, but over a yellow-bodied white-winged fly would go daft. For the early spring, in countries where the maples blossom in May —'

'A fly with a hackle of gray hair and wings of hen's feathers!' laughed the king. 'I would give much to see such a fly!'

'And so you shall, if it pleases you, sire,' said the physician, 'for this evening, after I have prepared your lady's medicaments against to-morrow, I mean to go over my book of flies and perhaps find some of which I may have scant supply. For I look forward to a good day's sport to-morrow. I have heard much of your brook from Alicaster and Dom Romeo —'

'They?' queried the king. 'Have they fished in my brook?' For the two were world famous at the time, greater physicians than Hilduin by far.

'No doubt you were at the wars,' said the physician. 'Alicaster came from Madrid and Dom Romeo from Lisbon for no other purpose than to fish in thy brook, and but that Duke Charles was sore beset with a tertiary fever I

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had been with them. But they wrote me telling me of the marvelous sport to be had here, and I have been ill at ease ever since, seeking a chance to cast my line over such waters as they proclaimed.'

'There are strange things in heaven and stranger on earth!' declared the king. 'Three great physicians playing at fishing! You will sup at my table, physician, and after we will look at these wonderful not-living, not-dead flies of thine.'

No doubt the king expected to see some monstrous thing as big as a pheasant cock, and when he saw the tiny flies the physician took from his parchment book he was amazed. His great hands, used to the battle-axe, fumbled the delicate winged hooks and could scarce hold them. He marveled at the many varieties the physician held were necessary, and admired — but scoffing the while — the clever method with which the physician attached the flies to the line. Even more he scoffed at and admired the deft manner in which Hilduin created new flies out of a barbed hook, a pinch of feather and a twist of silk.

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‘Now, by my faith!’ he cried at last, ‘I mean to go with thee to-morrow and see the fish laugh at thee when thou triest to make them believe these are true, living insects. Or else a trout is the biggest fool in the world.’

‘At times I think the trout is the wisest thing in the world, and the most wily, and the most clever,’ said the physician, ‘but as for going with me, thou art welcome.’ And so it was arranged.

It was a glorious day, with the breeze sweeping through the trees with a sound like rushing water, and the sun warm, and the sky freighted with hurrying white clouds. Hilduin was out of his bed long before the king had ceased snoring and was busy stringing a line of the finest Florentine silk upon a rod made of splints of lancewood cleverly bound together when the king sought him out. The king, too, had made ready for the trip to the mill-brook, choosing a dozen hearty men as a guard of honor and to act as guides through the rougher glens. These Hilduin laughingly made him dismiss, retaining only one stout fellow to carry the victuals and wine the king had provided.

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‘You have there a lance fit to joust at butterflies,’ said the king, looking curiously at the delicate rod in the physician’s hands.

‘Truth, Your Majesty,’ said the leech. ‘And although I should not boast of it, there is no lighter nor more evenly balanced rod in the world than this. One Albumazar, a merchant of Toledo voyaging to the East, sought it out in Byzantium at my request, and there it was no doubt a plaything for some harem favorite, used in catching golden carp from a lilled fountain.’

‘I should like to try a rod so delicate,’ said the king.

‘I have one for you that should suit your hand better,’ said the physician hastily. ‘A little heavier, but a good rod — the one I used before this came to me. It is against that tree.’

The king took the rod the physician had allotted him and examined it critically.

‘This cord is other than that you use,’ he said with a touch of suspicion in his tone.

‘The same, but waxed, as I am about to wax this of mine,’ said Hilduin, selecting a lump of

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beeswax from the metal box at his side. 'So! Now we will go!'

'But the flies?' queried the king.

'Will be chosen and attached to the line later, when we have reached the brook and have sought to learn what flies are fluttering over the ripples. If you are ready to go, sire?'

The queen was not yet far enough advanced under the physician's treatment to require his attention or a change of drugs and Hilduin had left word with his apprentice to send word of any suspicious symptoms that might appear during the day. He was, however, strongly of the opinion that the goodly dose of essence of poppy heads he had administered at daybreak would cause a somnolent condition and that he would not be needed before night. He, therefore, went toward the famous trout brook with a light heart, and the king was glad to put aside worry as well as he could.

'All day,' he said, 'messengers from Duke Charles will come seeking me, but I have given word to my seneschal that I am prostrate at my lady's bedside and cannot be seen until

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she takes a turn for the better. Now, by Saint Agnes and all the saints!' he cried angrily, as the end of his rod caught in the twigs of a thorn-apple tree. 'I vow by Saint Swithin this satanic tree shall be hewn down before another —'

'Stop! stop!' cried Hilduin. 'Don't jerk that pole that way, you nin — I beg pardon, Your Majesty! But you are not jerking at a battle-axe embedded in a helmet, sire. It is a delicate fish-rod. It is the only other rod I have with me. Let me show you how to disengage the line. So! And now, in carrying your rod through wooded places, carry it thus —'

'I see, Sir Hilduin!' said the king. 'Not like a banner pole that must be held upright to catch the breeze, eh?'

'The fisherman who returns with a broken rod is like a warrior who returns with his sword snapped across his foeman's knee,' said Hilduin. 'Let flies be lost by the score and lines broken by the yard but at any cost keep the rod unbroken.'

They had come to the mill-pond which spread in cool loveliness between grassy banks.

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Hilduin paused here and opened his book of flies.

‘It were well,’ he said, ‘before Your Majesty attempt the narrow reaches of the upper brook that you try a cast or two here where the trees and bushes do not offer difficulties.’

‘Will I catch a fish here?’ asked the king.

‘Even that may be,’ said the physician smilingly.

‘I shall not fish unless I can catch a fish,’ said the king.

‘Very well,’ said Hilduin, and he seated himself on the cool grass.

‘What mean you?’ asked the king, turning red in the face.

‘Nothing,’ said the physician. ‘You are a king at the side of the brook as you are at the head of your troop of men of war. At a brook-side I am not a physician, I am an angler. As an angler and a subject of Your Majesty’s good friend Duke Charles I would not be so foolish as to give orders to a king, but — if I am to teach fishing I teach in my own way or I do not teach! My good friends the trout do not, I regret to inform Your Majesty, know the

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difference between a king and a link-boy. Your Majesty will please fish in your own royal way. I will sit and watch you.'

'Let me have one of the wonderful flies, then,' said the king.

'You may be surer of fish by baiting your hook with worms,' said Hilduin. 'Your Majesty may find a fat worm under any rock he chooses to overturn to-day.'

'Let me have a fly!' the king commanded.

'No, by Hippocrates, no!' cried Hilduin. 'If I bring a man a-fishing, be he king or stableman, he will fish in my way or he may go fish in his own way. When you send for me to fish your lady back from the edge of the grave or worse, you do not seek to tell me how to mix my drugs nor how to administer them and, if you did but know it, I am ten times the fisher that I am the physician. I return to the castle. I will fish no more with kings.'

Hilduin arose in a temper and turned away. For a moment the king was tempted to grasp a rock and heave it at the head of the impertinent fellow, but instead he laughed. Not for years had any one spoken to him in aught but

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a craven tone and it was amusing to have a mere leech thus show anger.

‘Come back, sirrah!’ he laughed. ‘Have it your own way. I will be no more a king to-day, but a meek student under the illustrious fisherman.’

‘It is well,’ said Hilduin, returning. ‘Illustrious fisherman I am, although you say the words in sportiveness. Now, if you are willing, let me attach a fly to the end of your line. Stand here on the edge of the pool. See how far you can throw the fly out upon the water.’

At the first mighty effort the king’s rod whistled through the air, but the line wrapped itself around a clump of hill daisies and the fly remained in the grass at the king’s side. At the second effort the fly did indeed reach the water, but it fell a scant two yards beyond the spot where the king stood.

‘Observe!’ said Hilduin, and without apparent effort his line swung out behind him, curved gracefully forward, and the fly fell a good thirty feet out in the pool.

‘Again!’ he said, and the fly seemed to arise from the water like a living thing. This time

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it alighted as softly as a feather, and before the physician could draw it away again a great brown trout leaped full out of the water and plunged back again, the fly in its mouth.

‘Easy now, my friend!’ cried the physician, and he paid out the loose length of line looped over the fingers of his right hand. The pole, held as if over his shoulder, bent as the trout pulled at the line until the tip almost touched the water. As the fish turned, darting toward him, the physician drew in the line with his left hand, paying it out again gently as the trout fled once more. For full ten minutes he played the trout thus while Hincmar stood breathless and open-mouthed. Then the trout lay in the small landing-net. As it opened its mouth the tiny fly fell out. So slight had been the hold Hilduin had had upon the struggling fish.

‘Now, by Saint Swithin, that is marvelous!’ cried the king. ‘Had I not seen it with my own eyes I would have sworn no man could do what you have done. I’ll lay a wager that was the noblest angling you have ever done.’

‘That?’ scoffed Hilduin. ‘Merest child’s

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play! A broad, glassy pool in which the trout could run himself to death if he chose; no current to aid his fight; well hooked in the mouth; a fair large hook; no trees or bushes or brush to interfere with me! That fishing? That was murder and no less. I might as well have scooped the poor fish up in a net in the beginning. If that seems like sport to you, wait until you hook a trout double that size at a spot where the trees meet overhead and the brook rushes downward like a small torrent and where a fallen limb well supplied with twigs offers a refuge for the trout some few yards down the stream. That is angling! Hook your fish in the rapids and land him before he can worry the hook out of his mouth against a stone or a dead limb in the water! Come, I will show you angling!’

‘You were showing me how to cast the fly,’ suggested the king meekly enough.

‘True,’ said Hilduin. ‘Thus: catch the loose end of the line over the smallest finger. Not so, but so! No, do not swing the pole as if it were a battle-axe and every trout a helmeted foe; like this, please you. The wrist only. Up—

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one — two — three — down! Excellent! You will make a fisherman yet. Now again! Up — one — two — three — down! The wrist only. Give the line time to get out behind you. Keep your eye keenly aware of what trees and brush may entangle your line behind you; choose the spot where you wish the fly to fall in the water; let the fly alight as soft as a fleck of down. Now, again! Fine! *Fine!*

‘Indeed, it might be worse, might it not?’ exclaimed the king, his face beaming with pleasure. ‘As soon as you know that “up — one — two —” business you ——’

A trout — a fair-sized trout — leaped for the king’s fly, but in his excitement the king jerked the fly away before the fish had taken the hook.

‘I did it! I almost had him! Stand back now and let me have another cast at that fish! Did you see him jump for my fly? I tell you what! Long as my arm, wasn’t he? Now, by all the saints, I’ll get him yet. Yes, that’s true, I must only use the wrist! I get rather excited. Now, one — two — What in the name of Satan!’

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The king's fly had caught in the one tree within three hundred feet of the mill-pond.

'Gently!' urged the physician again. 'Let me free it. Nothing to fret about. Just take it calmly and coolly. See — like this — easy — easy — easy! Well, no matter. Bound to lose a few flies. Now suppose we try a yellow body with gray wings this time. There you are. Cast just where that chip floats by that leaf. You've got him! *You've — got — him!* Give *him* LINE! Oh, too bad! You should have given him a chance to run as soon as you had him hooked.'

'But I almost had him, didn't I?' cried the king excitedly. 'Yes, yes! I understand — let him have a little line if he wants to run, and then draw it in as he comes back.'

'Keeping it taut, but not too taut,' said the physician.

'Yes, yes!' said the king. 'Where shall I cast now? I tell you, leech, this yellow body fly is a wonderful fly. It's my favorite fly, I tell you. I will not use any other fly no matter — GOT HIM! Yes, I know, let him have line — so! Easy, easy, Sir Fish! Now you come, do you?

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Well, I'm here. You can't fool your old King Hincmar, Sir Fish! Whoosh, more line wanted? There you have it! Now, gently! Gently! Leech, give me that landing net! Whup! whup! HURRAH! What is unsatisfactory about that, hey? Leech, give me your hand: I CAUGHT A FISH!'

'And you will catch many more, I can see that,' said the physician kindly. 'I think you have the spirit of a true fisherman. And now suppose we try a bit of the brook just beyond that boulder, which must be the gray stone of which Alicaster wrote me. He wrote he left a splendid trout there. He hooked him but the rascal was too wise for him. Dom Romeo fished three days for the old fellow and got but five rises. He says he left a white-body yellow-wing in the old fellow's jaw or he is much mistaken. The "Grandfather of all the Trout" he calls him. Now, gently, get as close under the big rock as you can and cast over it into the pool, keeping your head hidden. What!'

The king had hooked the Grandfather of all the Trout! His line whizzed out; the physician clinched his fists and teetered up and down on

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his toes in an agony. The king was handling his line marvelously well for a beginner, but, stepping too far forward, he stepped off a slippery rock into the black depths of the pool. He came up puffing, but with his pole held high above his head, and scrambled for the shore. The trout, taking advantage, jerked away.

‘Too bad!’ exclaimed Hilduin. ‘He will sulk for a day or two now. No use trying him again now. Alicaster writes of a pool just above this. The Willow Ripple Pool he calls it. But if Your Majesty is chilled —’

‘Come, let us see the Willow Ripple Pool!’ said the king, his teeth chattering.

All day they fished the mill-brook. After the midday meal the king would have no more of Hilduin’s lessons.

‘I can see well that I am but a spoil sport for you,’ he said. ‘I’ll get along well enough. I know the rudiments, do I not?’

‘You have learned more than the rudiments,’ said Hilduin. ‘You will make a famous fisherman if you persevere. I shall write to Alicaster and Dom Romeo of you. We were speaking when last we met of the strange fact

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that there had never been a fishing king. They will hail you into the gentle brotherhood with delight. So go you ahead up the brook and I will follow after at a goodly distance.'

All day the king fished, now standing wet-footed in the brook, now wading waist-deep across to avoid a sheer edge, now standing with wrinkled brow as he sought to cast just a foot beyond the uttermost length of his line. The trees rustled above his head, the brook now roared through a narrow reach and now crept silently between willowed banks. Birds to which the king had never given heed before chirped and warbled to him and he turned and eyed them between casts. Strange looking flowers, yet flowers he might have seen any day had he chosen to see them, attracted his eye, growing on the acclivities at the brook-side. Crows cawed overhead. He wiped an annoying fly from the side of his nose with the tip of his left forefinger. The basket under his left arm filled with trout. The sun began to slip behind the mountain and Hincmar turned reluctantly down the stream. He cast his fly here and there but his progress soon became

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almost a flight, for he saw it would soon be dark and he was keen to make one more cast into the Gray Stone Pool. As he approached he crept softly along the hillside, his eyes on the pool. The evening flies were beginning to flutter over the pool, yellow bodied flies with thin yellowish wings, and Hincmar paused to change the fly he had been using. As he looked up he saw a leaf flutter and a thin silken line dart over the pool. Hilduin was still angling for the Grandfather Trout! Hilduin, having hung behind, had returned to the Gray Stone Pool to try once more for the Grandfather Trout! As the king watched, half angry that the physician should have thus spoiled his opportunity, a small trout took Hilduin's fly. In the gathering dusk the king could no longer see the thin silken line. The physician himself was hidden. Only by the ripple where the line cut the water and by the antics of the trout could the king know how well the physician was playing the fish, but already Hincmar had learned enough to know that Hilduin was showing a master hand. The king stood motionless, absorbed in the sport, and when, at last, the physician's

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landing net crept out from behind the clump of willows and slipped under the trout the king uttered a whispered 'Good!'

'Get behind yonder clump and cast into the pool,' whispered the physician. "'Tis now the big fellows come forth to feed.'

For a half-hour longer the two anglers cast into the Gray Stone Pool. Then darkness came and they walked homeward.

The queen, thanks to her innate health and in spite of Hilduin's drugs and copious blood-lettings, was much recovered by the time the two anglers reached the castle. The first hot resentment of the king's desire to go to war having passed, she was in a more reasonable frame of mind and begged forgiveness for her naughty temper.

'Men must to war,' she said, looking up at Hincmar from her couch. 'Even love may not hold them when war calls. I beg your forgiveness for my wayward temper, my lord. 'Twas good of you to stay your impatience and wait here at home to-day to learn how my ailment prospered. All day have messengers come from Duke Charles pleading for your arms and

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aid. Go now, my lord, if it please you, and I will wait for your coming again, praying you may be kept safe.'

The king bent and kissed her, saying some gentle words, then turned eagerly to the door and, ere he was well outside the queen's chamber, his great voice shouted for Ralph and Mortimer and Pasquale, bidding them prepare for his departure at daybreak. All night the castle rang with the preparations and the queen tossed sleeplessly.

As the day broke King Hincmar, clad in full armor, bade farewell to the queen and, after a word with the physician, who was to remain yet another day before rejoining Duke Charles, mounted his stout steed and rode away at the head of his long array of men at arms. Duke Charles, impatient at the delay, had forged forward toward Lothair's country, passing the frontier and spreading fire and destruction as he went, yet not daring to meet the rebellious Lothair in full battle till Hincmar should arrive.

Noon found King Hincmar and his troop well up the mountain-side toward Lothair's

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frontier, and the king halted for the midday meal under the black pines and green chestnuts of the Hildermont. The while his men prepared the food, the king stretched himself at full length upon the pine-needles and closed his eyes. High overhead a crow cawed, sailing across the valley. The mountain breeze whispered through the trees. The hundred small woodland noises combined to make that colored silence that is sweeter than utter silence and, in the midst of it, the gurgle of a brook hastening over smooth stones caught the king's ear. He raised his head and listened. Slowly — for the weight of his armor was great — the king raised upon one elbow that he might hear better and, with a mighty effort, he struggled to his knees and to his feet.

Over the pine-needle carpet the king walked noiselessly in the direction of the brook's chatter and at length found the stream. It was a larger flood than his own mill-brook but much like it, fringed here and there with willows, with half-fallen pines and chestnuts reaching out across the stream and mossy rocks damming the current into small pools. Holding by

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the stem of a small oak tree, the king leaned out and gazed down into the water.

‘I warrant there are trout here in plenty,’ he said. ‘A fair spot yonder from which to make a gallant cast. Here I should use a gray hackle, letting it fall as light as a bit of floating down just where yonder ripple sweeps the rotting log-end.’

He drew back and made his way softly up the bank, keeping behind the willows, bending his kingly head to creep beneath the boughs or standing tiptoe to glance through some opening in the foliage. Suddenly he came upon a pool twice the length of the great hall of his castle. At the far end the brook fell tumultuously down in a leap thrice the height of a man, and on two sides the dripping rocks were overgrown with moss except where columbines and other delicate flowers found root in the crannies or on small ledges. High up on either side the pine trees leaned out over the pool, some sending long roots down to find nourishment in cranny in the rock wall. At the hither side the pool ended on a pebbled beach save where, against one wall, the brook broke away be-

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tween jagged rocks to dash madly on and down. Over the pool, now rising and now dipping to its surface, darted or hung many insects and, as the king watched, here and there a trout leaped half out of the water and splashed back again.

‘Now, by the heavens, that is a pool!’ cried the king. ‘Not from one end to the other of my land have I such a pool! My Lothair, ’twill be war indeed this time, for I shall not cease until this pool and all this brook, and this whole mountain-side is mine by right of my stronger arm and mightier numbers. I would Hilduin might see this pool; ’twould cock his ears and make his old eyes sparkle. And so he shall when I return with Lothair well beaten and ——’

Across the pool, gliding here and there, a golden moth swung irresolute. Close by the rougher water where the falling brook struck the pool one great drop of water struck the fluttering insect. It beat the air with its wings, but ere it could regain its flight it touched the surface of the pool. There was a flash of scales in the rainbow that hung over the pool, a

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scattering of glittering drops of water, and a huge trout had leaped full out of the pool and had fallen back with a weight that sent the ripples to the farthest edge of the pool. It was a glorious trout, a most wonderful trout! The king drew a deep breath of amazement. His fingers twitched.

‘Now, by — by ——’ he muttered, unable to find an oath great enough to swear, ‘by all the gods and little fishes, if the trout in the Gray Rock Pool is the Grandfather of Trout, this is the Great-great-grandfather! By Saint Agnes and Saint Swithin and all the saints on the calendar, I will have this trout! Oh, what a trout!’ He turned suddenly, forming a trumpet of his hands, and shouted loud the battle-cry of King Hincmar the Warmaker: ‘*A moi! A moi! Dieu et mon droit!*’

Through the underbrush his men came running and stumbling, ready to beat back whatever foe might have appeared, but they found the king standing beside a giant pine and no foe in sight.

‘Ralph,’ cried the king, ‘mount the light palfrey and speed to my castle, seeking out the

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leech Hilduin and bid him come hot haste bringing his rods and lines and flies, for that I have found the noblest trout that ever swam the waters of God's earth. Mortimer, ride thou to Duke Charles as if the devil followed thee and bear him word I quarrel not with Lothair and that if he would do me pleasure he would call a truce. Pasquale, ride thou to Lothair where'er he may be and carry this word: that I am weary of war but strong of heart and ready for it and a-horse and on my way and that it lieth with him whether it be peace or war, for that I demand as the price of peace no more than all this hither side of the Hildermont, no more or no less. Off with you!

They hurried away to do his bidding, but before they had gone far the king hailed Ralph and brought him running back.

'Yes, sire?' said the messenger.

'Tell the queen, my lady, that I camp here and go not to the war. Give her my fond affection and bid her be of good heart, for that I have set about to make a peace between Duke Charles and Black Lothair. And, Ralph!'

'Yes, sire?'

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‘As thou valuest thy head heed this: say unto the leech Hilduin “Golden wings and yellow body”!’

‘Yes, sire,’ said the fellow, but unable to conceal his amazement at the words. ““Golden wings and yellow body!””

‘Just so! “Golden wings and yellow body,”’ repeated the king. ‘Now, be off with you! Or, hold!’ said the king, looking upward to where a golden moth fluttered beneath the pine boughs over his head. ‘Add, “with perhaps a touch of red on the body.” Yes, “Golden wings and yellow body, with perhaps a touch of red on the body.” Be off! An you hurry I may be able to make a cast or two before the sun sets behind Hildermont.’

So they left the king there, standing beside the pool, and his lady, the queen, wept no more over his going to war but — because of his battle-hardened fingers and the clumsiness of them — the queen and her ladies gave over a part of the time they had customarily spent over their ’broideries and spent it winding flies for His Majesty. Thus ended the wars that had worried the lands of Hincmar and Black

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Lothair for many generations without ceasing and therefor it is that King Hincmar is sometimes known as Hincmar the Peacemaker and sometimes as Hincmar the Angler, and his reign as the first that brought the blessings of peace to his land. So God rest his soul, and may God rest mine when I no longer can cast a fly, but if God wills I mean to go a-fishing for trout fish on the first day of the next month and I care not what wars vex the world.

THE DEMIGOD



THE DEMIGOD

AUNT MARY, her hands in the dough, looked out of the side window of the kitchen and saw Donald seated on the grass playing his jew's-harp. With a half-formed thought that it was a blessing to have a boy like Donald who never ran away and who was always just where she expected him to be, she pushed back a stray strand of her brown hair with the back of her hand and continued kneading her bread dough.

The house was a huge white affair with green blinds and a wide sloping gable roof, set well back in a great square of yard — two lots of sixty feet each, one hundred and forty feet deep. There were two apple trees, a yellow mellow and a red-cheeked Benoni, and eight or ten other trees in the yard, and a barn and a woodshed backed against the alley. Sometimes the grass was very long and unkempt; sometimes a man came and cut it with a scythe, trimming the edges with a sickle. Once, and once only, the house had been repainted.

THE DEMIGOD

Money was always scarce in the big white house.

Donald himself was barefoot and his browned legs were scratched. One toe was bound with a bit of once-white rag where he had stepped on a piece of broken bottle. His hat was a 'ten-cent straw'; his breeches were homemade of what had once been part of Miss Mary's black redingote and were patched behind and on the knees with fresher pieces of the same outworn garment. He sat in the long grass with his legs doubled under him, facing the big Benoni apple tree, twanging the tongue of the jew's-harp and breathing a tune that was no tune at all.

Miss Mary finished her bread-making and leaned out of the window.

'Donald,' she called, 'don't go away. I'm going to run over to Mrs. De Mortimer's for a few minutes.'

The boy looked up. It was a few seconds before he seemed to grasp the meaning of his aunt's words.

'No'm,' he said. 'All right. I won't.'

'There are some cookies in the cupboard, if you want some.'

THE DEMIGOD

‘Yes’m,’ he answered in the same detached way. ‘All right. I don’t want any.’

‘Well, maybe you will,’ said Aunt Mary, and she closed the window. The next minute she was in the front of the house, throwing on a light wrap; but Donald was farther away than that. In an instant he was miles and ages away. In the time required to place the jew’s-harp to his lips he was in Greece and in the age of heroes and demigods, and he was himself one of the lesser gods — Orpheus.

It was not a game, as boys play the game of Indians or pirates. He was making a serious test to discover whether he was, or was not, in fact Orpheus. It had occurred to him that he might be Orpheus, and there is nothing like trying a thing out when you are in doubt. When Miss Mary spoke to him Donald was just about deciding he was *not* Orpheus. For an hour he had sat before the Benoni apple tree and had played as sweetly as he was able, and the Benoni apple tree had not moved an inch toward him. Orpheus, playing the same length of time, would have had the Benoni apple tree, and the yellow mellow, and the oxheart cherry,

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and the silver poplar and the six pine trees and the row of five maples all clustered around him, ready to be led whithersoever he wished, like the children following the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

The Benoni apple tree had not moved an inch.

There were, of course, certain minor reasons why, even if he was Orpheus, the Benoni apple tree might not move as it should. A jew's-harp is not a lyre, and Orpheus used a lyre. At the best a jew's-harp that cost two cents at Hazard's Notion Store and that occasionally hit back a stinging blow on the tongue was hardly an instrument of sufficient nobility to assist in moving a dignified old Benoni apple tree with a girth of six feet.

'Azhoo — zha-zhoozhall — zhoo — zhall — zhoo.'

Donald gave the tree three repetitions of his musicless tune in which to move, if it ever meant to move, and then gave it up. He got to his feet and found that one leg had 'gone to sleep,' and he hobbled to the barn and brought out the box in which were his two mud turtles. He lifted the turtles from the box and carried them to the middle of the yard and dropped

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them in the grass. Then he retreated five yards and seated himself and played to them on the jew's-harp. Turtles, being more mobile than trees, might be better to begin on.

For several bars the turtles lay as he had dropped them, heads, legs, and tails clamped tightly inside their shells, and then they put forth their heads tentatively. Nothing annoyed them. They put forth their legs and tails and raised their heads. Donald played more vigorously; he added a guttural vocal noise to the hollow strumming of the jew's-harp. The turtles hesitated, seemed to be considering the music and, with the surprising agility they could show on occasion, started away from Donald at top speed. Donald slipped the jew's-harp into his pocket and darted after the turtles.

Donald put the turtles in their box and returned them to their place in the barn. It was fairly evident he was not Orpheus. The discovery did not annoy him. If he was not Orpheus he was Someone Else. Of course you have to try things before you can be sure.

Donald caught half a dozen flies and put

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them in the turtle box, decided he would eat a cookie, after all, secured a handful from the cupboard and lay at length on the grass while he ate them. Then he ate three Benoni apples in quick succession, went into the house for a book to read, took another handful of cookies and spent the rest of the afternoon flat in the grass with his book. He liked to lie with his head in the shade and his back in the warm sun. There were times when he felt that he and the sun were brother gods, but he never held to this long. He had a feeling that he was greater than the sun; he *felt* greater.

For one thing he *felt* that he was a superior being. There were times when he knew that, if he just wanted to, he could turn people into stones and stones into people. Sometimes he would look at some quite inoffensive old gentleman and say, to himself of course: 'Turn into a stone!'

It never quite worked. With the splendid illogic of youth Donald would dismiss that incident as not worth taking into account, and the fine feeling that, if he really wanted to, he could turn men into stones remained.

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Particularly when he stood on the top of a hill did Donald know he was a god, and the wider the landscape that lay below him the surer he was that if he wished he could reach out his hand and make the trees bow down and the houses and barns crumble into dust.

A young god must, of course, 'find' himself before he sets about the regular job of divinity, and the business of being a boy interfered not a little with Donald's assumption of the full power of godship. School work, bringing in the wood, splitting the kindling, running errands and other matters took his mind off the more important matter considerably.

There were many other proofs that Donald was a god. If he wanted to, for instance, he could stand stiff, fold his arms, and rise slowly but steadily into the air until he floated above the tops of the trees and houses. Common mortals could not do this. Donald had never done it himself. He had tried and it had never quite worked, but he knew he could do it. Some time he *would* do it.

He could also fly. He could stand on an eminence, ever so slight, and stretch out his arms

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and glide into the air, and skim here and there like a darting swallow. He had tried this, too, and it had never quite worked; but that was merely incidental. He had, also, absolute dominion over the beasts and fowls and insects. When he said the word they obeyed him instantly. When a hawk flew across the sky he could raise his hand and say: 'Turn! Fly the other way!' The hawk never did — at least it never had yet; but Donald felt that he was still inclined to be a little easy about such things. When the time was right it would be quite a different matter.

He could command the river to recede. He had actually done this — actually commanded it to recede. It was when the Mississippi was on a rampage, rising at alarming speed. Every one was in terror. Another six inches and the great river would be over the island levee. Hundreds of men were working night and day, throwing sand bags on the top of the levee.

This was all quite unnecessary if they had but known it; they need only have appealed to Donald. They did not appeal to him, so he took the matter in hand himself.

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'Auntie,' he said meekly, 'can I go down and see the river?'

'I think not, Donald.'

'Ah! All the boys are going down. Lemme go, please!'

'Well, but don't stay too long. Come back in time to get in your wood.'

'Yes'm. All right. I will.'

He went to the river. He stood with his bare toes within an inch of the yellow flood where it lapped the sloping bank alongside the steam-boat warehouse and he commanded the river to come no farther. He ordered it to recede. He stood until it rippled against his toes. The next morning the paper said the river was still rising. This did not disturb the young god. If the river did go over the levee, it would be a great thing to see. Sometime, after he had seen that happen once, he meant to command the river to fall when it was rising, and it would fall.

You can see that there were innumerable proofs that Donald was a god. He was, as a matter of fact, omnipotent. Anything he willed must be. He was as strong as Thor and

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as all-seeing as Jupiter. Everything indicated that he was a true god. Especially the halo.

There was no doubt whatever about the halo. When Donald walked with his back to the sun and his shadow stretched out in front of him he could see little rays of light, tremulous little auras, emanating from the head of the shadow. That was a Sign. He did not believe the shadows of common mortals radiated light. There was, too, the other fact that his soul was not like the souls of ordinary human beings.

Donald discovered this for himself. He had two smooth blocks of pine he had been using as cymbals, clapping them together, and when he tired of this he rubbed them together, flat side against flat side. The flat sides grew hot under the friction, and when he threw them down the shadows cast by the blocks radiated halos like those his own shadow radiated. He tried a couple of cold blocks and they radiated no auras. The logic was absolute — he had created souls for the blocks of wood.

He had a vague notion that there was a sort of conspiracy of silence regarding his godship.

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There were times when he felt that every one knew he was a god, but that they did not 'let on,' probably because they were waiting for the right moment to acknowledge it, some mighty moment, as when half the town was gathered under the big tent of Barnum & Bailey's Circus.

He walked in a wonderful and half-mystical world. He could not be killed by javelin, spear, arrow, or anything else. No animate or inanimate thing could harm him. This feeling was always particularly strong just after he had cut his toe on a piece of broken glass or had run a splinter into his hand. He was deathless; he knew this, for he had never died, and had never been killed.

But the greatest proof of all was the splendid feeling of unlimited strength and power. He never decided just what god he was, but he was most often of the opinion that he was an entirely new and greater god than any the Greeks or Norsemen or others had known.

Then, slowly and imperceptibly, the splendid consciousness that he was a new god given to the world slipped away from Donald. He

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did not know it was slipping away; he did not know it had gone; he just simply and ordinarily forgot he had ever been a god at all. One day he would be standing with wind-swept hair on the top of his own Olympian hill back of the Fair Grounds, breathing the incense of a world, and the next week he would climb the hill again and it was nothing but a plain hill and he a boy going a-fishing, and the hill would never be Olympus after that. His godship slipped away more quietly than the snow steals away. It slipped away in the minutes when he was struggling with a spelling examination and getting a percentage of sixty-eight, when seventy-five was needed in order to 'pass.' It vanished unheeded while Swatty climbed to a higher tree branch than Donald dared climb to. It left him while 'Dinky' Meyers out-rowed and out-sailed him on the river. More than all it deserted him as he crowded close against the fence trying to hide the patches on the seat of his breeches while Billy and Sam passed with a bevy of giggling girls.

Those were years when Donald was less than

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a mere mortal — he was a worm, an ant, a slug, anything not worth considering. Instead of standing on a hilltop to bid the sun stand still and all nature to bow down to his young omnipotence, he scurried sheepishly around a block to avoid a girl, a bully, or a teacher. He was bashful and he was cowardly. He carried a constant feeling of guilt; he felt that he ought to beg pardon for permitting himself to inhabit an earth peopled by those so much his superior.

This was his constant feeling — ‘constant’ as his feeling of godship had been constant. His aunt, his teachers, and his fellows occupied much of his time. There would be days and weeks when he did not happen to think what a miserable earthworm he was. He ran and shouted and played ball and studied his lessons and went to the head or foot of his class just as other boys did. He went to parties and was shy or annoyingly forward, as were other boys. He did his chores grumblingly and went fishing eagerly, and was an absolutely normal boy in every way. But he had lost his godship and had become less than a slave. He had become a

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clod, subject to every whim of nature and less assertive than the grass he walked upon.

‘Donald,’ said his Aunt Mary one day.

‘Yes, Aunt Mary?’

He was sixteen then, almost seventeen. He was diffident and much given to blushing accompanied by an unpleasant internal sensation, as if his blood was congealing.

‘Cousin Jane Dabney and Dorothy are coming up from Jefferson to-morrow. They will probably stay a week.’

‘All right. Yes’m.’

‘I was just thinking you might wear your Sunday suit to-morrow. You look — you look a little shabby.’

‘Do I?’ asked Donald. He glanced down at himself. It was indeed an obvious fact that the knees of his breeches were worn through.

‘And you had better wear your Sunday shoes also. Are they polished?’

‘I guess so.’

‘You had better make sure. You are always careless about your shoes. And be sure that you polish the heels. You never do.’

‘All right. I will.’

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'I think that's all. Oh, after school run down to Herben's — will you, Donald? — and tell him to send up two quarts of ice cream to-morrow, between two and three. Vanilla. And ——'

'Yes'm?'

'If you want to ask a couple of boys and girls to come over to-morrow afternoon to see you and Dorothy, you may.'

'I guess I don't want to.'

'Well, that's all. Perhaps it is just as well not to ask any the first day. I'll have Aunt Jane and some ladies to look after. That's all, Donald.'

'Yes'm. Good-bye.'

It was late spring, but when Donald came home from school the next afternoon Dorothy sat on the porch like some delicate ivory enhanced by a setting of black velvet. He learned later that she wore black velvet because she had twinges of rheumatism, and black velvet was supposed to be good for that. All the way home from school Donald had wondered how it would be if he chose this occasion for running away from home to become an independent being.

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He had considered such an event now and again when it seemed the only way to escape his diffidence and the distress it caused him.

The house was set well back from the street and he knew that Dorothy and her mother and the other ladies would be on the porch. He would have to open the gate and walk all the way up the walk to the porch. He would have to be introduced to Dorothy and her mother. He would have to sit and eat ice cream. And when, after he had eaten the ice cream, he wanted to go away, he would have to say, 'May I be excused, please?' To say that before Dorothy and her mother would be soul-racking. He wished the ground might open and engulf him before he reached the gate. He was in an agony of diffidence.

There were six steps that led up from the gate to the walk, and Donald opened the gate and hesitated. He turned and closed the gate carefully for the first time in his life. He took care in latching it. Then he tried the gate to see that it was latched. He turned toward the house and cleared his throat. He did hope he would be able to say, 'Howju do, Dorothy,'

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when he was introduced, but he doubted it. He tried it. He said 'Howju — howju —' several times.

Then an amazing thing happened. As he mounted the first step he saw the wonderful vision in velvet arise from the chair on the porch and come toward him. She had no hat and her hair was gold in the sunlight. She had cuffs and collar of white lace, marvelous against the black velvet. She came down the walk, neither quickly nor slowly but as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do. Before he had topped the steps she was there, holding out a white hand and smiling pleasantly.

'You're Donald, aren't you? I'm Dorothy. Your Aunt Mary said you could show me your rabbits while she's getting the ice cream ready. Will you?'

'If you want to see them.'

'I'm just crazy to see them. Your Aunt Mary says there is a black one with white on it that I make her think of. I think that you ought to call it Dorothy.'

Donald blushed. 'He — he's a buck,' he

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said, and then added hastily, 'But I'll call him Dorothy if you want me to.'

'How many have you?' she asked, changing the subject promptly and naturally, and before he could answer she said, 'Come up and meet Mother, then we can go see them. Are those your books?'

The books were Donald's school-books, swinging in a strap in his hand. Dorothy took them.

'Why, *I* study this arithmetic myself!' she exclaimed, and somehow it seemed to make all the difference in the world that she studied it. It was, if you stop to consider it, quite wonderful that she should study the same arithmetic and that he had a black rabbit of which Dorothy reminded his aunt. He hardly remembered to be diffident on the way to the porch and, somehow, it was not at all like being introduced to have Dorothy say, 'Mother, this is Donald,' or to have Dorothy's mother say, 'Oh, you great, big boy, you!'

'We're going to see his rabbits,' Dorothy said immediately.

'Don't be long,' said her mother. 'You

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know! Ice cream! Dorothy is so fond of ice cream,' she added, turning to one of the ladies, and that was all the dreaded introduction amounted to.

You would think from this that Donald was done with diffidence, but he was not. The moment he passed around the corner of the house with Dorothy his blood seemed to congeal. He did not dare look at her or toward her.

'There's a boy in our town has rabbits, too,' said Dorothy.

'Is he?' said Donald hoarsely, and then he gulped and his face burned. It was, he felt, the most idiotic mistake a person could make to say 'Is he?' instead of 'Is there?' or 'Does he?' He could feel in his bones that she would never forget it as long as she lived. She would return to Jefferson and tell every one how she had said a boy kept rabbits, and Donald had said 'Is he?'

'But *he* hasn't any black ones,' said Dorothy. 'His are all white or maltese. I never saw a black one.'

'Oh!' said Donald.

They reached the barn, and of course the

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rabbits were all hidden as far back in their hutches as possible. Donald had to get on his hands and knees and poke them out into the wire-netted enclosure. Dorothy exclaimed over each as it emerged. She was very enthusiastic over the black buck. Donald stood mute.

'May I feed them?' Dorothy asked.

'All right. If you want to,' said Donald.

'Let's go back to the porch,' she said suddenly. She was clearly offended. She had tried to be 'nice,' and he would not be 'nice.' She did not speak on the way back to the porch. Neither did Donald. He wanted to; he longed to tell her that he didn't mean to seem not to like her; but he could not speak at all. He could not do anything but walk beside her dumbly.

'They're perfectly lovely!' Dorothy said when they reached the porch; but she pushed in between her mother and Aunt Mary, making a barricade and a reproach of them. Donald sat miserably on the porch step and ate his ice cream and cake. He managed to gulp them down somehow, and then he arose and started away.

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‘Donald!’ called his aunt.

‘Yes’m. I’ll be right back,’ he answered; but he did not come back.

Donald went to the barn. He climbed to the hayloft and seated himself on a box and stared moodily at the sunlight falling on the dusty floor. And she was going to stay a week! Probably people did manage to live through such weeks, but he did not see how he could manage it. Gee!

The next evening, while he was playing dominoes with Dorothy, he really noticed for the first time how delicate and white her hands were. There were little white moons at the bases of the nails. He glanced at her hands now and then surreptitiously.

‘Oh, you told a fib!’ said Dorothy suddenly.

‘I did n —’ he began hotly and then grinned foolishly. He tucked his hands under the table.

‘You can’t hide it that way,’ she said. ‘I saw it. On the second finger. Let me see.’

He reluctantly held his hand above the table, showing the white star on the finger nail.

‘Boys have such strong hands,’ she said.

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‘Did anybody ever tell your fortune? I know how.’

She took his hand and was turning it palm upward when his face flamed. He drew his hand away.

‘I guess I won’t play any more,’ he said. ‘I guess I’ll go to bed.’

He went up to his room and tried to read ‘Warlock o’ Glen Warlock,’ but it was no use. Girls spoiled everything. He was done with that girl! No girl could hold his hand. If she had been a boy and had tried anything like that he would have slugged her one. That settled her. He might, hereafter, be coldly polite to her, but more likely he would not see her at all. Just ignore her. That’s the how!

The hammock hung from the Benoni apple tree to a ring in the kitchen window frame because the house shaded it from the afternoon sun there, and after supper the fifth night of Dorothy’s stay Donald, to escape all females, lay stretched out in it. He had his head toward the tree and was staring up at the leaves. Suddenly he raised his head and listened. He looked, and saw Dorothy coming toward the

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hammock. She was alongside before he could escape.

‘May I sit here a while?’ she asked. ‘Don’t get up. There’s room. I came to tell you.’

She seated herself primly away from him and the hammock immediately slid them together. Each ignored this. They pretended they were not arm to arm.

‘We’re going home to-morrow morning,’ said Dorothy. ‘Mother’s sister is sick and she has to go. I’m awfully sorry. I’ve been having such a good time I just hate to have to go.’

Donald looked straight ahead.

‘Oh!’ he said non-committally.

‘You don’t care much, do you? You don’t like girls.’

‘Why don’t I like girls, I’d like to know?’ he blurted.

‘I just thought you didn’t like them,’ said Dorothy. ‘You don’t like me.’

‘Why don’t I like you?’

‘Well, you don’t,’ said Dorothy solemnly. ‘You don’t like me and you’re not even polite enough to try to pretend you do.’

She swung the hammock back and forth, re-

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straining it with her toes and heels. She was not looking at Donald, she was looking down at her white hands. He dared to glance at her long enough to note this.

‘I don’t care if I do say it,’ she exclaimed with sudden vehemence, ‘you’ve been just *mean* — just as *mean* as you could be. Every minute I’ve been here you’ve been mean. You just tried to see how mean you could be.’

‘I didn’t! I didn’t, either!’

‘You *did*! When — when I — when I went out to see your rabbits and — and ——’

Donald’s heart stood still. She was crying! She was actually crying. This wonderful being of pink and white and gold, clad in the mysterious darkness of velvet, was actually crying and crying because — Donald’s heart leaped like an unleashed hound. She was crying because *he* had been mean.

She held her head down so he might not see she was crying, and Donald turned and looked at her. His heart stood still while he did a deed more daring than man had ever dared before. He raised his hand to his hair and let it descend slowly as if he did not know where it was going

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to come to rest. He tried to give the whole matter an air of accident, but when his hand came to rest it happened to fall upon one of Dorothy's white hands. And she did not draw her hand away!

He drew a long breath. Dorothy wiped a tear away with her free hand. A minute passed, two minutes. Donald drew another deep breath. He leaned over and suddenly kissed Dorothy on the cheek. It was the first kiss he had ever given except in play.

She did not slap him. She did not draw her hand away from his.

'What did you do that for?' she asked in a whisper.

Donald was trembling.

'Because I like you!' he said. 'I like you better than any girl in the world.'

She held his hand more closely.

'I'm glad,' she said.

'Can I kiss you again?' he asked, and he was shaking like a leaf.

'Why do you want to?'

'I told you why. I like you better than any girl in the world.'

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‘I oughtn’t to let you,’ said Dorothy, ‘but I’ll let you just once more. Because I’m going home to-morrow. And because I like you better than any other boy in the world!’

She raised her face and Donald bent forward, and just as their lips met in the most innocent of adolescent kisses the hammock turned completely over. It sent them sprawling. It was most unromantic. Dorothy giggled as Donald helped her arise.

‘You’re so *strong!*’ she said; but Donald said nothing. He took a long breath and raised his head high. Suddenly he laughed aloud.

‘Are you laughing at me?’ asked Dorothy.

‘No! I’m just laughing,’ he said.

It was the truth. He was just laughing; just laughing because he had had his first kiss; had received his first tribute of love. He felt — What was it he felt? He felt that he was indeed a demigod! A woman loved him!

ROMANCE



ROMANCE

WE must have Romance. Human nature demands it. Even in the future when our World-Fixers have fixed the world so neatly that brain-pans will be opened at birth and all brains beyond a certain size trimmed down to the legal state standard, we will have Romance. Even when the State (all-wise, as States always are) arranges to have every new-born child face rammed into a steel mould and kept there until it resembles all other faces, when all hair is decreed by law a certain shade, and when eyes that sparkle more than the legal limit are dimmed by the Deputy Supervisor of Optics, there will be Romance.

The State can do away with booze, tobacco, tea, coffee, dimples, neat ankles and brains, but it can never do away with Romance. Not, at least, unless it can arrange to have us all born at the age of fifty years.

An immortal, like Washington, Mike Angelo, Shakespeare, Beethoven, is given to the world

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but once in a blue moon. Only one tenth — as often — once in centuries — is a human being born without Romance in the heart. There is a legend among the Copper River Eskimos of Victoria Land that a man named Akatatigitik, absolutely free from and impervious to Romance, was born in that tribe in the days when there was no ice and no snow north of Hudson Bay, winter or summer. But Susie Berkow was born, at Postville, Iowa, June 6th, 1885.

I have read, I imagine, something like eight hundred and seventy-two thousand love stories in books, magazines, and newspapers, and eight hundred and seventy-one thousand of them were stories of the struggles of two men for a girl, or two girls for one man. The love-life of the world, judged by the love stories of the world, would seem to be one big, burning battle of infuriated and infatuated males, struggling in pairs for the same girl, or of clever, brilliant females moving heaven and earth for the same man. Getting a wife would seem to be a regular set battle. One would think the first thing necessary was for a lover to hunt up a rival so

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that the two might do battle for the hand of the dear, palpitating creature.

The battles vary, but they are always tense struggles. There are seven hundred and twenty-two ways in which rival lovers battle (in love stories) but battle they must. They fight with wits, swords, coupling pins, pistols, and — in the movies — custard pies. They speak haughtily, slap on the cheek, bite each other on the neck, strangle each other, murder, undermine, defame, and have a dickens of a time generally. I would like to see Postville, Iowa, on a spring day, when the young men's fancies were turning lightly to love, if all this was true as gospel. That sleepy, dead-and-alive Main Street, with its street car every half-hour, would be a scene of carnage that would make Petrograd at the moment of a Bolshevik uprising look like an afternoon nap. Lungs and livers of demolished lover-males would hang from every projection and the length of Main Street would be filled with mad-eyed males, in pairs, killing each other.

That is not a bit like Main Street, Postville, even in the balmiest spring days. So far as I

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have been able to learn, no lover there ever killed a rival lover, let alone dismembering one. Once in a long period there are rumors that two young fellows are 'stuck on' the same girl. For a week both young men send the girl boxes of chocolate creams. One of them asks her to go to a party but she has already accepted the invitation of the other. Nothing happens. The disappointed lover asks some other girl to go to the party with him.

You see, there are so many girls in Postville (and in the world) and they are all such suitable girls. There are always enough girls to go around, and a few perfectly dear ones left over. There is no reason why Benny Wright, wishing a sweetheart, should load a .32 automatic and go forth and slaughter Sam Curtis, the haberdasher's clerk, in order to secure the smiles of Bessie Dilbrow, when Mamie Stack has an equally sweet smile and is ready to be mighty pleasant to Benny because no one took her to the last oyster supper at the M.E. Ladies' Aid.

The murder and destruction thing simply is not done. George Castrow, who has not

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thought of love, is weighing out granulated sugar in Durbin & Sweet's grocery, when Mrs. Stanbury comes bustling in and talks him into buying two tickets for the Strawberry Festival. George tucks them in his vest pocket, and says, 'Fifty cents more gone to the dickens!' A week later Eddie Ryan says he is going to the Strawberry Festival. He is going to take Mamie Little. He coaxes George to go along.

'Ah! I ain't got no girl,' says George.

'Whyn't you take May Deemer? She'd go with you,' Eddie says. 'Come along anyhow.'

So George turns to the telephone. He 'joshes' May more or less, and then plays safe, to 'save his face.'

'Say, May, you don't want to go to the Strawberry Festival, do you?' he asks her.

A couple of months later it is rumored that George Castrow and May Deemer are engaged. They don't really know whether they are or are not. So they make it formal. ¶They become engaged. Sooner or later they get married.

It is all so simple and tame and uninteresting (from the love-story writer's point of view) that it might have been arranged by card

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system. No murders, no stranglings or burning-eyed rivals. They just 'kept company' for awhile, and then 'got engaged' and then 'got married.' That is how the hundreds of thousands of matings come about, all over the world, every year. No life and death battles. No Romance.

No Romance? Listen! It is all absolutely soggy and dripping with Romance. Those gentle, inconspicuous, seemingly tame and uninteresting couples simply wallow in Romance. They bathe in it, splash in it, go down in it and come up gasping and strangling and burning and smothered.

Even a watchmaker's helper, like Billy Bell, with a sweetheart as void of Romance as Susie Berkow, is swept to and fro, tossed and tumbled, and beaten and bruised by the wild sea of Romance.

At twenty-two Billy Bell was a poet but it was his misfortune not to know that he was anything more than a watchmaker's helper. He had never put two rhymed lines together. In both these particulars he was like ninety-

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nine out of every hundred young men of Postville, and of the world since time began. All young men are poets — Romantic poets. Fate does not happen to drive spigots in many of them, so not many spout forth poetry. I figure there are six mute, inglorious Miltons per square mile in the United States.

On the other hand Susie Berkow was not a poet. There are far fewer female poets than male poets, mute or otherwise. The proportion is, perhaps, one to one thousand, and Sue Berkow was not one of the rare few. Sue was plain, simple prose. She was extremely simple prose. She was such simple prose that a child could read her. She was a primer — 'I see the cat. Does the cat see me? The cat sees the dog.' Any one could understand Sue Berkow. She was the least mysterious of young females.

Sue Berkow was a fair, sweet girl, just a little plump and just a little motherly. She had graduated fifth or sixth in a class of twenty at the High School. She confidently expected to be married in due time, and meanwhile she loved chocolate creams, ice cream soda, food in general, church, buggy rides, and new dresses. She

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loved romances — the printed kind — but she did not draw analogies between the adventures of the heroines and her own life. She was a warm-hearted, matter-of-fact girl.

Billy Bell began 'going with' Sue Berkow when she was notably unattached. Several boys 'went with' her, taking her to the ice cream socials and to parties. There were Rance Carter, James Long, Sam Oberwitzer, Ed. McCall, and Billy Bell, but they were not rivals. They were a 'crowd,' and there were five or six girls in the 'crowd' besides Sue. Sometimes one boy took one girl and sometimes he took another.

As soon as the other young men saw that Billy was Sue's 'beau' they left Sue alone. The girls put Billy in his proper place when he threatened to stray from it.

'Oh! you take Sue,' they would say when he asked one of them to go anywhere with him. 'I guess Ed is going to ask me. I guess Sue sort of expects you to, don't she?'

Neither Sue nor Billy made any particular choice in the matter. There was no violent love-at-first-sight business. Probably there

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happened to be a time when he asked her, three times in succession, to 'go' with him on some of the crowd's goings with the result that the others thought perhaps he and Sue might like going together. It would have been equally satisfactory to Sue had it been Rance or Sam or James or Ed. Billy would have been as well satisfied had it been May or Laura or Ina or Kate. It was the merest bit of chance that Sue did not find herself engaged to one of the other four boys, and only a slightly greater chance that her fiancé was not one of several hundred other young men in town. The same with Billy. It might have been any other girl.

Once engaged — in Postville you are tacitly engaged long before the formal words are spoken — Billy became immediately and violently pro-Sue. Sue became 100 per cent, solidly, faithfully and (barring accidents) eternally pro-Billy. She was Billy's 'for keeps,' as they say in Postville. And Billy was hers 'for keeps.' She understood that. She never doubted it a moment.

The night Billy learned from Sue's own lips — in a couple of ways — that she loved him

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was a wonderful night for Billy. As a matter of cold fact he need not have been surprised at all. Every one in the crowd had known it for weeks. Sue's father and mother knew it. Even Billy knew it. But right then Romance stepped in and Billy entered a new world. He had won a kiss and a confession and he was transfigured and raised to a place among the lesser gods. He walked on air as he went home. He did a hop-step of happiness. In front of Miller's big lawn he rested his head against the cool iron fence and shed a few tears of joy. He swore an oath that he would always be kind and gentle and true to Sue, stopping in the middle of the sidewalk and holding his hand above his head. 'I swear it!' he said solemnly, and then put his hand in his pocket quickly and pretended he had been humming a song when he saw a belated pedestrian unexpectedly emerge from the dark.

Before he went to bed that night he wrote Sue a letter. 'Oh, Sue, if you only knew how I love you and how happy I am now! I can't seem to tell you when I am with you, but I love you more than anything in the world!'

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He posted the letter as he went to work the next morning, still walking on air, as if he had pneumatic feet, although he was going to see Sue that evening. By the most mysterious of chances she happened to pass the watchmaker's and tapped on the window, and they had ice cream sodas together at Groll's, holding hands under the small round table.

For a week or two this high peak of happiness glowed under Billy's feet. His head was among the reverberating stars, and the sun and moon were his playthings. He had battled with the world and had wrested Sue from it in triumph. He had laid siege to Sue's heart and had torn her from the dread heights of intended celibacy, in which she had sought to hide herself. He was a heroic conqueror.

It made no difference to Billy that the world had not lifted a little finger to battle back. Romance camouflaged that. It made no difference that Sue was so humanly ready and willing to descend from the dread heights of a celibacy that she meant to be only temporary that when Billy smiled she couldn't have been kept on the dread heights with a brick wall and

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a barbed wire entanglement. That had nothing to do with it. Romance came in and brought a new set of scenery. As illustrations for Billy's calm and sedate courtship Romance brought pictures of all the immortal lovers and threw them on the screen of his brain. For awhile Billy was a completely unbalanced lunatic. He went as crazy as a bug. Romance simply drove him loco for awhile. It is the way Romance affects the young male along about then.

One of the first things that attacked Billy was a deep, an unutterably deep and dire, sadness. Sue did not truly love him!

Of course, there was not the slightest basis in fact for this. Sue did love him. Sue never changed. She liked Billy and she meant to marry him. Sue never changed at all. It would have been with the greatest possible difficulty that any human being could have seen in Sue anything but the most whole-souled, faithful love for Billy. Her father said, several times, 'For Heaven's sake, Mary, let me know when that fellow is coming to the house. The way Sue behaves when he is around makes me tee-totally sick. What's got into the girl?' Her

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love was so entire and complete that it was almost like New Orleans molasses or glue, it was so clingingly sweet and sticky.

‘The way she slobbers all over that big, raw-boned nuisance!’ her father complained. ‘She’s the worst case *I* ever saw!’

The deep melancholy that came upon Billy overnight in the full career of his triumphant joyousness puzzled Sue at first. She was frightened when he hid his face in his hands and really wept. She coaxed him to tell her what was the matter and that made him worse. Anything would have made him worse, because the time had come for it, and he had to be melancholy. He told her, with no little agony, spurning her a little, that he did not believe she really, truly loved him.

‘Why, Billy Bell!’ she exclaimed. ‘After the way I let you kiss me! I *don’t* know what you mean!’

‘I can see it now,’ he said. ‘I did not see it before. You don’t love me the way I love you. I can’t help it. I can’t *make* you love me. I can’t help it if you don’t.’

‘Well, the idea!’ she cried. ‘Billy, what’s

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the matter? What did I *do*? Well — I don't know how else I can *make* you think I love you.'

'Make! That's just it. You want to make me *think* you love me, but you don't love me. You don't love me the way I love you.'

He had called that night at eight-thirty and this sort of thing kept up until eleven o'clock — two and a half hours of it. He was all right when he went home. He sang as he walked home. He had forgotten entirely that he had ever been sad. He was riotously joyous.

Sue went up to her room rather thoughtfully. She could not understand it at all. She knew she had given him no reason to feel that way, and if he had felt that way when he came there was no reason for his changing so suddenly. She stood before the mirror a long while, trying to imagine what had been the matter with him, but it only puzzled her. She gave it up. She supposed men were that way. They had, probably, worse trouble in their insides when they ate things that did not agree with them — such as mince pie, or cheese.

When she spoke of it to her girl friends they

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agreed that all the young men — nearly all — had funny fits like that.

‘When they have them you’ve just got to let them have them,’ Laura told her. ‘It don’t mean anything. They get over them. Has Billy got mad at you yet?’

‘At *me*? What for?’

‘Well, not *for* anything. Just *at* you. Just because.’

‘No. Goodness! do you think he will?’

‘Yes, he’s pretty sure to, I guess. They all do. He hasn’t said he guessed he’d kill himself, has he, yet?’

‘You mean, Billy say that? Why should he —’

‘Oh! there isn’t any “why.” They just say it. I thought maybe Billy had said that when he had the weepy fit. Some of ’em say it when they have the weepy fits, but some say it when they have the jealous fits.’

‘Well, that’s one thing Billy won’t have,’ Sue said. ‘He won’t have a jealous fit, because I won’t give him anything to be jealous about.’

Laura laughed.

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'*That* don't have anything to do with it,' she said. 'You wait and see.'

Sue did not have to wait. It came that very evening. Billy had been a regular evening visitor now for some weeks, and he had not missed a Sunday afternoon. He had gone to church with Sue every Sunday morning. One or two weekday afternoons he had taken her rowing on the river. This evening, approaching the house he saw the shadow of a male on the parlor window shade, and he knew the profile. It was the silhouette of Sam Oberwitzel, who had come to ask Mrs. Berkow whether she wanted the ice cream for the next day's Sunday School picnic in bricks or in bulk. It made no difference to Billy why Sam was there. He was there, and that was enough. If he had not been there it would have been just the same. The time had come, in his Romance, for him to be jealous, so he was jealous.

He turned away from the house and went home and up to his own room. He threw himself on his bed and bit the pillow while his fingernails clawed the counterpane. He exhausted himself in jealous anger. About half-past nine

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he got up, brushed his hair, changed his collar and tie and walked to Sue's home. He rang the bell angrily and faced the door with a hard look.

'Well!' he exclaimed when Sue opened the door.

Sue had been ready to scold him affectionately for being so tardy but the moment she saw his face she knew something was the matter. He was white and haggard. The most intensely bitter hatred gleamed in his eyes — gleamed coldly. She half expected he would strike her across the face and then go away forever. Instead of that he went in and stayed until a quarter after eleven.

It was an awful time. He accused her of unfaithfulness, deceit, fickleness, infidelity, betrayal, light-mindedness, pettiness, treason, disloyalty, aiding and abetting the enemy, being in love with Sam Oberwitzer, caring nothing for her sworn promises, hard-heartedness and general depravity. Toward the end of the evening, about the time her father began to rap on the floor above with his shoe, Sue wept. She protested. She asked to be forgiven. She begged. It was no use. Billy went

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away — just after her father called down to know when that young fool was going, if he was *ever* going — without kissing her and without saying good-night.

The next morning, before breakfast, a small boy brought her a note. It began, 'Dearest, dearest Sue: — Please, *please* forgive me.' About three o'clock in the afternoon one of the drivers from Dorman's Livery arrived at the picnic grounds with a two pound box of chocolates. Inside was a note. It said, 'I love you more than anything in the world, Billy.' That evening when Billy went to the house he did not say a word about Sam or jealousy or unfaithfulness. It was an entirely blissful evening.

After two or three months of this sort of thing Sue should have been acclimated, so to speak, but she was only dazed. She had never imagined that a courtship was anything like this. She had thought it would be a calm, happy period, a little quieter than anything she had known. Instead of that Billy, who had been known as 'such a steady young fellow,' was like a surprise package. She never knew

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whether he would be a dynamite bomb, a chunk of maple sugar, or a tear-fountain. She might get a honeyed love-note on the six o'clock mail delivery and at eight-thirty Billy would show up and, after a whole torrent of denunciation, swear he would never see her again. And the next morning on his way to work he would stop to invite her to the Elks' entertainment that evening.

From eight-thirty in the morning, when Billy was pretty sure to be safe at work at the watch-maker's, until eight-thirty in the evening, when he was pretty sure to call, Sue was happy and placid. She went about her work and her pleasures cheerfully and pleasantly, and did not worry. A few minutes before eight-thirty in the evening she would begin to wonder how Billy would be that evening. She always hoped he would be 'nice,' but she never knew. Even after months of this sort of thing she always went to the door smiling. She never knew, when the bell rang, what Billy would face her when she opened the door. She never got so she expected the angry Billy, or the jealous Billy, or the coldly sarcastic Billy.

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Once or twice, when he was 'mad at her' (as she called it) but when (as he called it) he had 'given her up forever' she ventured to wash her hair, thinking he would stay away a couple of evenings, at least, but she quit that. She could not depend on his 'mads.' He came back the next night after a 'mad' and he came back the next night when he wasn't mad. He always came. Her father said he was the worst he had ever seen or heard of.

If the girls had not told her that the other boys behaved in the same weird way Sue would have thought she had hooked onto some sort of lunatic. She could not understand why Billy acted in such a crazy way. How could she know that in Billy, fated to live in an unromantic town, to choose a mate unromantically, and to court her unromantically, all the Romance of the ages was struggling for a brief life before Billy married and settled down into an unromantic married life?

In Postville there are no giants to slay, no dragons from whose claws the fair one must be rescued, no wily villains seeking to steal the lady-loves of others, no Romance! I do not

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blame the young chaps for taking their one mad whirl of it, building it out of their own brains, imagining vain things, going crazy over rivals that do not exist, going melancholy over infidelities that are as impossible as a blue moon, creating heartaches and angers and terrible tempests in teacups.

Billy Bell endured every pang and agony and hope and fear and ecstasy that the greatest lovers of history endured and never missed a day's work at the shop. He renounced, renewed, cast off and went from the urge of suicide to the heights of bliss and no one but Sue ever suspected it in the least, and Sue only thought he was 'sort of funny.'

It was fortunate that Sue was not equally furnished for Romance. If she had been there would have been some terrible scenes, but she bore it patiently, like a mother who is patient with a naughty child. She did hope Billy would not keep on being 'funny' after they were married.

The actual engagement was short. As soon as it was announced Billy changed. The announcement was a notification to the world

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that he had destroyed all rivals, won — by his gallantry — the entire love of his beloved, and conquered all obstacles. Romance was satisfied.

The night before the wedding day Sue would not let him stay late but they sat in the hammock in the side yard together until ten. Sue was very happy. Billy was very happy, too, but just a little disturbed because he had had to figure pretty close to cover the wedding journey with his meager funds, and he did hope he had enough to last until they got home again. He was a little worried, too, about his salary — whether they could really keep house on it as he had bragged they could. He did think a great deal about love that evening but nothing about Romance. Not a thought.

One thing, only, troubled Sue. She wondered whether she had not better speak to Billy, before it was too late, about his jealous fits and his angry fits and the various fits that he had permitted to rule him during their courtship. This was about the last chance, she felt, and the best chance, to get him to promise to try to 'not be that way' after they were

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married. She felt that they had had, because of him, a very tempestuous courtship.

‘Billy,’ she said.

‘Yes, Sue?’

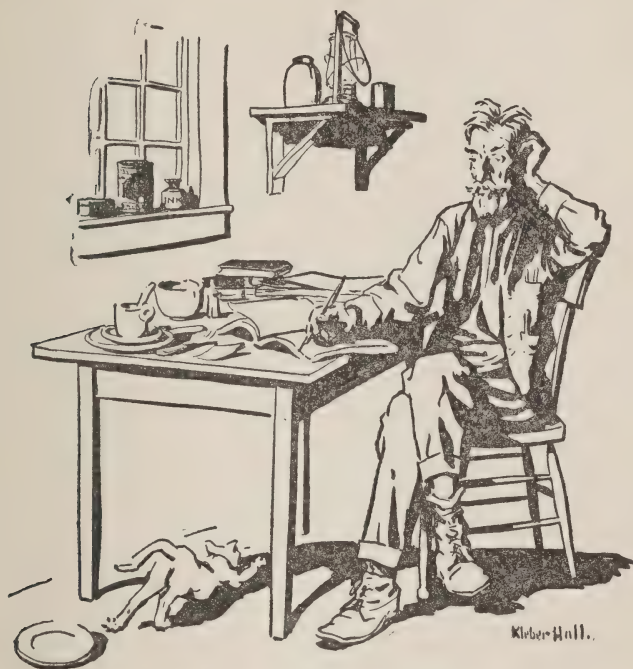
‘You know all this time — since you picked me out for sure — you remember all the evenings you’ve come to the house ——’

‘Indeed I do!’ he exclaimed. ‘I’ll bet no two were ever as happy as we were, Sue. Never! It seems just wonderful! Why, we never had a cross word or a quarrel or *anything*! We were both just happy all the time.’

For a long moment Sue was silent and Romance, satisfied that the brief day of her sway was over, departed gently.

‘You can kiss me once more, and then you’ve got to go, Billy,’ Sue said; ‘if we’re going to be married to-morrow we ought not stay up so late to-night.’

RED SAND AND PICKETY-ROUGH



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THE book was bound in cheap oil-board and the pages were coarse yellow paper, ruled with blue lines, and on the front cover was printed 'Day Book' in black script, but above this Silent Joe was printing in blue-black ink 'Joe C. Deercomb, Vol. 17.' When he blotted this the blotter absorbed most of the ink and the lettering seemed to disappear entirely, but Silent Joe did not worry; the label on the bottle guaranteed the ink to turn to a deep, glossy black: 'Writes a beautiful blue-black which turns to a deep, glossy black,' was what the label said.

When he had completed the inscription, Joe leaned back in his chair and scratched his ear with the handle of his pen while he observed the effect of his work. The letters slanted uphill quite a little — he could locate them by the moistness the ink had left — but that did not matter much. It was a fairly good job.

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He opened the book, pressed it flat with the edge of his hand, and wrote at the top of the first page, 'Contents, Vol. 17.' Under this he wrote, on the first line:

Wabblers, Black & White.Pg. 1.

Although he wrote with great care, the letters were large and schoolboyish. He turned to the next page and placed a figure 1 at the top. Here he wrote 'Wabblers, Black & White,' again, as a title. He leaned back once more and his eyes looked out of the window at the blue August sky into which a fluffy white thunder-head was rearing a mountain of marvelous beauty. With knitted brows Joe stared at the cloud. He combed his red-gray beard with one hand. He was gathering together all he knew about 'Wabblers, Black & White,' to put into Volume 17.

'The B. & W. wabblers,' he wrote, when he had thought deeply for five minutes, 'is sort of not very plenty hereabouts but I see one now and again, mostlys onto a pitch pine tree or something. Its streaky black and white and no bigger than a wren, hardly, but then she aint so streaky. Cunning little cuss, sort of.

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It twits sort of see, see, see. I and Mrs. Gratz seen one to-day August nine and she shode me it in her bird book so I know its it. Nests of grass and strings of bark down low by the ground nigh a tree. Eggs is white and sort of wreathy of redlike brown up by the big end. It is called a wabblers because ——'

Silent Joe hesitated. He looked at the cloud again and combed his beard with his hand again.

'It is called a wabblers, I guess,' he wrote, 'because it wabbles sort of when its standing on a limn of a tree.'

He looked at this doubtfully. It might be right, but, on the other hand, he had never been told that this was a fact and he could not conscientiously say that he had ever noticed that any of the wabblers did wobble much. Nothing like as much as a sandpiper or a cat-bird. With sudden resolution he arose, pulled on his coat and went forth to find Mrs. Gratz, who was the bird woman of the beach colony and knew about birds. He found her busy getting dinner, but she had time to spare Joe a word or two.

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'What is it, Joe?' she asked, facing him through the back-door screen.

'Them wabblers birds, Mis' Gratz,' Joe explained. 'I sort of got to thinkin' it was sort of funny they was called wabblers when they don't none of them seem to wobble much.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Gratz brightly, but without any sign of amusement. 'It isn't "wabler," you see, Joe; it's "warbler" — because they warble.'

'Yes'm,' Joe said. 'I guess that's so, ain't it? Only, now, that there Black and White one we was talking about this mornin' — I don't say he wobbled much of anything special, but seems like he wobbled more'n he warbled, at that.'

Mrs. Gratz turned down the flame of her kerosene stove. She knew Silent Joe; when he began trying to learn a thing he was inexorable; until he was satisfied he would not stop asking questions. Mrs. Gratz went into the little living-room and brought her bird book to the back door.

'Here it is, you see,' she said, showing him the picture. 'You see it is "warbler."'

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‘Uh-huh!’ said Joe. ‘Might be a mistake, huh? That printer might have got it spelled wrong, ain’t it likely?’

‘Oh, no!’ Mrs. Gratz assured him. ‘It’s “warbler” here, too, you see, Joe; “Parula Warbler,” “Yellow Warbler” — And here, and here, and here. See, here it says, “Bay-Breasted Warbler — song, a low, liquid warble.” That’s the way they name some of the birds; one warbles and it is called a warbler, and then when others are like it in some respects they are called warblers too, even if they do not warble much; even if they do not warble at all.’

‘Yes’m,’ Joe said. ‘Well, I guess I got to be going. Much obliged to you.’

‘Not at all,’ said Mrs. Gratz. ‘Any time you want to ask me anything ——’

‘Well, now,’ said Joe hesitatingly, ‘if I got a right to ask it, Mis’ Gratz, could I ask you what the name of that bird book is, and where you got it from, and what the cost of it was?’

‘Why, certainly,’ Mrs. Gratz said, and she told him and Joe jotted it down in the little red book he had always with him.

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For almost twenty years Silent Joe had been compiling what threatened to become an Encyclopædia of Unrelated Facts, but they were all facts that had to do with Fire Island Beach, from the Fire Island Light to the far eastern end of Shinnecock Bay, and the work was the result of a noble ambition that had urged him during the whole long twenty years. At the top of the first page of the first volume of this great work was written 'Red Sand' and the second entry had to do with 'Pickety-Rough.' He had been twenty-five when he wrote those first entries and now he was forty-four. The volumes had each ninety-six pages and, allowing a page for 'Contents' in each, there were ninety-five pages in each book, now filled with information. In the completed sixteen volumes there were, consequently, some fifteen hundred and twenty pages, closely written in Joe's big hand, and, as the average was about six topics to the page, it is safe to say that Silent Joe had written down the facts regarding at least ninety-one hundred and twenty things. As he had asked anywhere from ten to a thousand questions regarding each topic, it

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will be understood why he was called Silent Joe.

'He's the durndest talkingest inquisitivest creature anywheres on the bay!' was what they said of him. 'There ain't no shut-up to him. If he ain't askin' why a pitch pine has three needles in a bunch instead of four, he's askin' how many eggs a fluke lays to once, and then as good as tellin' you you are nothing but an ignorant liar that don't know what you're talkin' about anyway.'

'Oh, pshaw, now! Joe never'd do that!'

'He wouldn't say it, drat him! but he'll come back a couple of days or ten years later and prove it on you! That's worse!'

And yet, although he was called Silent Joe because he talked so much, Silent Joe was in fact the most silent of men. When he was not asking questions, he said nothing at all. If he had not acquired this habit of asking questions, few would have heard him say a word from one end of the year to the other. He did not talk about himself or about his doings.

'What you gettin' all this heap of facts for, Joe?' some one might ask him. 'Goin' to print a book of it?'

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That seemed reasonable. A Book of Facts concerning Great South Bay, and Fire Island Beach, and the bays to the east, and the Long Island shore towns, and the wrecks that had dotted the beach, and the nine thousand and odd — or forty thousand, for all any one knew — other facts might make a book.

‘Nope,’ Joe would say.

‘Then what in tunket are you doing it for?’

‘Oh! one thing and another, maybe,’ Joe would say. He was a silent man. At forty-four he was not only silent, but a little grim, a little harsh around the mouth, and a little frowning across the forehead. He lived in a shack, as a bachelor. If asked what his occupation was — as a census taker might ask him — he would reply: ‘Oh! I sort of foller the bay.’ He clammed some; he waded the grass shallows for bait shrimp some; he had a yawl for hire some; he could do carpenter work some. At forty-four Joe knew more about the beach and the dunes and the history of Fire Island than any man living — than any man or woman that had ever lived.

And would tell you less!

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He was a fact-miser. For nearly twenty years he had been gathering facts, getting hold of what seemed to be a fact and then asking a thousand questions about it and testing the answers for truth, discarding what seemed untrue or doubtful, asking more questions, comparing answers with other answers and with the fact as he saw it until he had what he believed was pure gold. The pure gold he stored away in the sack — in the volumes — and he never spent them. He might ask a hundred questions about the Black and White Warbler, but if you asked him: 'Joe, what bird is that?' he would say: "'Tis a sort of bird, ain't it?'

'Is it a warbler?'

'Might be, if it ain't nothin' else.'

'It looks to me like a Black and White Warbler, Joe.'

'That so?' he would say.

If a scientist, a naturalist, a botanist, a historian, or any man or woman reputed to have special and exact knowledge came to the beach, Silent Joe dug into him like a tick. Silent Joe clung to him and asked him questions.

'My word!' one of these men said, when he

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had had a week of Joe. 'I thought I had met inquisitive men before this, but that man can ask more questions in an hour than I can answer in a year. Who is he, anyway? If he didn't look as he does and speak as he does and wasn't so unquestionably what he is, I'd think he was a German scientific spy or something of the sort. He's asked me everything from what was the largest number of Indians on Fire Island at any one time to why the red sand along the beach is red.'

'Did he ask you about Pickety-Rough?'

'Yes, but that was Greek to me; what is Pickety-Rough?'

'It's a cousin to Shin-Hopple. Didn't he ask you about Shin-Hopple?'

'Yes; I didn't know anything about it. What is a Shin-Hopple?'

'I don't know. It's one of the things Silent Joe always asks about; that's all I know about it.'

Shin-Hopple, be it said here, is a station on the Delaware & Northern Railway, away up in the Southern Catskill Mountains. The mountain-side there is covered with a vine that

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catches your shins and trips you and tumbles you down; the mountaineers call the vine shin-hopple (which seems to be from shin-hobble — that which hobbles your shins), and thus it is a cousin to Pickety-Rough, which is a stretch of dune on Fire Island Beach. You'll find on page 1 of Volume 1 of Silent Joe's works this:

Pickety-Rough. Folks up that way says as how its called that because its rough prickety vines mostly that catches hold on you when you go to go through. Its greenbrier mostly. Theys two kinds. Ones brisly greenbrier and ones glokkus-leafed green Brier. Brisly has got 3 nerfs in the leafs and glokkus has got 5 veins in the leafs. A feller says theys a place in the Cattus Kills mountains called Shin-Hopple which is named because vines.

Joe wanted to know more about Shin-Hopple, just as he wanted to know more about 'greenbrier' and asked until he did know it, as is shown by Volume 5, page 45, of his works, where it is set forth that 'greenbrier is part of the Smillacks family,' together with other in-

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teresting facts regarding leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit, the whole followed by the item regarding shrimps.

At forty-four Joe was tall and thin with hands and arms like brown iron and a face as brown as an Indian's. He wore khaki that had been washed to the softness of satin, and blue cotton shirts that had washed all but white. Often he was barefoot, but sometimes he wore rubber boots or sneakers. He had eight sweaters that had been owned by eight men of eight different sizes. He had — but of this he did not brag — five cottages in one of the beach communities, and several thousand dollars in Liberty Bonds or in the bank.

On his forty-fifth birthday Joe sat in his shack with Volume 17 open before him at page 23. The bottle of ink that wrote blue-black and turned to a rich, glossy black stood on the window-sill before him, but the cork was not withdrawn. From a long contemplation of the sky and the pine tree outside his window, Joe turned to the book again and thumbed over the empty pages. For the first day in many years he had not a single fact to

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jot down. In the small red memorandum book in his hand were eight facts — facts he had jotted down in it that day — but when he had looked through the contents pages of the seventeen volumes he had found the facts already written there.

It did not mean that Joe had gathered and recorded everything man could know regarding Fire Island Beach, the ocean on one side of it and the bay on the other side of it, the sky above it and the world and universe contiguous to it. There might be a million facts he could still hope to find, but that was not momentarily important; what was important was that for the first time in twenty years Joe had not a fact to jot down. Like the miser who counts that day lost that does not bring in at least a penny, Joe felt glum. Although he did not put it that way, the vanity of human hopes was gnawing him.

One by one he looked through the seventeen volumes, and sighed. For an hour he sat, his head bent forward and his beard on his chest, thinking. He arose and walked here and there in the two small rooms of his shack, stopping

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to look at a door hinge, at the broken shaving-mirror, at the oil stove. Dusk came, and he lighted his lamp and seated himself and took up the volumes again, but there was no satisfaction in studying them. He put on his hat and went to the door and returned again. For another hour he sat, going over his whole life's work, thinking of the future, of Silent Joe, of many things. He arose, looked here and there for his hat, found it on his head, blew out the flame of his lamp and went out.

Joe's yawl was at the dock and the wind was right. He cast off and steered for the Long Island shore and in two hours he was tied along the dock and on his way through the village to a house on the outskirts. His shirt (blue once, now almost white) bulged a little in two places, for he had Volume I of his works tucked inside it. At the small brown house he stopped. He rapped on the door.

As if posing for an illustration of a novel, Ann Carter stood in the door, a lamp held a little above her head so that she might see her visitor without the glare of its light in her eyes.

'Why, bless my stars, Joe Deercomb! If it

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ain't! What 'n earth ever fetched you off from Fire Island this time of night and year?'

'I come to see you,' Joe said. 'I come to make a call on you.'

'Well, I declare! If you ain't a queer one! I'll warrant you sailed all the way over just to ask me somethin'. Ain't that so?'

'Yes,' Joe admitted.

'Well, come in, then,' Ann said, 'for I dare say you'll keep on askin' more'n half the night, once you get started. Why, I feel right complimented — to think there's something I can answer and the folks over on the beach can't! Set there, Joe; it's a comfortable chair for men-folks. I don't like it much; it tilts back more'n I like — always gives me a notion I'm goin' over backwards. Well, what was it you wanted to ask?'

'Well, now, it was this, Ann,' said Joe gravely; 'will you marry me, Ann?'

'For the land of goodness!' Ann Carter exclaimed. 'Marry you? Did you say "marry" you, Joe?'

'That's what I said,' Joe declared doggedly. 'And I mean it, too. I don't mean nothing else.'

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'Sakes!' Ann cried. She stared at the man in the tippety chair as if she had never seen him before and was trying to guess, all in a minute, what manner of man he was. 'Well, you do beat all, Joe Deercomb! Coming all of a sudden this way, and asking me offhand to marry you! It's good I wasn't setting in that rocker or I would have gone over backward, sure enough. Marry you! Sakes!'

'If you mean you won't ——' Joe said.

'I don't mean nothing!' she said. 'I mean I'm flabbergasted, Joe. Land sakes! Give me a minute to get my wits together, can't you? Be reasonable, Joe! When a man you've known all your life long, that never cocked an eye at you, as far as I know, comes sudden at I-don't-know-what-time-of-night and pops out, "Will you marry me?" like a shot out of a gun, I should think a body had a right to study for a minute!'

'That's all right,' Joe said. 'I don't know as I blame you. Study, if you want to.'

'Hum!' said Ann, and she folded her arms and studied, keeping her eyes on Joe, seeing him now and then, and now and then not see-

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ing him, but her thoughts. She knew quite a little about Joe; she knew he had been a nice boy years ago, and that he was a steady worker in his chosen profession of 'follerin' the bay' and that he was by no means a pauper. She judged that he was hale and hearty — 'as sound as a nut,' she told herself. She had never seen or heard or thought anything about him that made him in any way objectionable. Neither had she any desire to remain a lone spinster forever, although each passing year had made that seem her destined portion. On the other hand, this was queer, this coming late in the evening without any preliminary court-ing or hanging around, to pop out a question suddenly.

'Hum!' she ejaculated at length. 'I don't know as I like it much. It's queer-like, this way of doing. What made you pick me out, Joe Deercomb?'

'I thought of you first,' Joe said. 'You was the first that come into my mind.'

'Hum! Well, that's something,' Ann admitted. 'I don't know as I would fancy being any man's second-third choice.'

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'I sort of always did like you,' Joe volunteered. 'I reckon that's why you come into my mind first off. Soon as I thought of getting married seems like you come right into my mind.'

'I did, did I?' said Ann, her eyes sparkling with a touch of anger. 'Well, maybe that's your way, Joe Deercomb ——'

'It ain't my way, if that's what you mean,' said Joe stolidly. 'I ain't got no way; this is all new to me, this sort of business.'

'Well, whether it is your way or not your way, Mr. Deercomb,' said Ann, 'I can let you know that it's considered a heap more complimentary to think of a person first and then think of marrying her. Or him, either. A woman ain't fond of being thought of the way you'd think of a mess of clams. It is well enough to get hungry and then think of clams and then go and get what clams can be got ——'

'I ain't hungry, to speak of,' said Joe without emotion.

'Oh!' cried Ann. 'Oh! Well, it's plain you wasn't born to be no Don Joo-ann. Not that

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I'd care for one, if it comes to that. But a woman don't fancy being treated like she was vegetables on a vegetable stand, waiting to be come and took — hit or miss — because dinner is due. No, sir! It's a sight more complimentary to a woman to treat her like she was a yawl — like she was a neat and tasty yawl that you saw and couldn't rest until you was owner of, whether you needed a yawl in your business or not. I don't know as I take it very complimentary, you coming like this and not much difference whether you come for a bushel of potatoes or for — me!'

'I don't know as I was thinkin' of complimentaryness,' Joe said. 'I guess that didn't come into my mind. But, don't let it worry you, Ann. I didn't aim to upset your feelings this way. If the idea don't strike your fancy ——'

He felt for his hat.

'Now, hold on, Joe Deercomb!' Ann commanded. 'You men never have a bit of sense, anyway. A woman has to have her talk out, one way or the other. Sakes! A woman don't get married every day in the year, does

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she? She's a right to know whether there is any sense to a — to a proposition like this, hasn't she? Coming at me sudden like this! What ever possessed you to think of getting married in the first place?'

Joe unbuttoned one button of his shirt and drew out Volume I of his compendium of Fire Island Beach knowledge. He opened it at page 2 and held it toward Ann and she took it. She looked at the book and then at Joe and then at the book again.

“‘Red Sand; Pickety-Rough,’” she read. ‘Sakes! What’s that got to do with it?’

‘Seventeen of them books,’ said Joe. ‘Sixteen wrote full, and one partly.’

‘I know,’ Ann said. ‘Folks thought you was crazy or something. I’ve heard tell plenty about these books. Red Sand and Pickety-Rough, huh?’

‘Sixteen books full and one partly,’ Joe repeated. ‘And all true facts. If, by and by, I found out one wasn’t true I scratched it out and wrote in what was true. I been at it twenty years — mighty close to twenty years.’

‘It’s a long time,’ Ann said.

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‘It went quick,’ Joe said.

‘And what was your notion, Joe?’ she asked. ‘Wasn’t you going to marry until you got seventeen books full?’

‘Nothin’ like that,’ Joe said. ‘I never thought of marryin’ at all — not until this evening, when I come right over.’

Ann let the book drop into her lap and leaned back in her chair. She shook her head.

‘You do beat all! You are the beateniest man, Joe Deercomb!’ she exclaimed. ‘Ain’t there no way to get you to speak right out? I certainly never! If I was to tell anybody what-all you’ve said this night they’d think I was crazy or you was crazy or both of us was. You do exasperate me awful! What on earth did you fetch this book to me for if it hasn’t anything to do with marrying?’

Joe looked at her with amazement.

‘But it has, Ann,’ he said. ‘It was that made me think of it.’

Ann Carter raised her hands and let them drop in her lap.

‘There!’ she cried. ‘That’s the way you’ve been talking all the time — it hasn’t anything

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to do with it, and it has all to do with it! Such a man! I declare, if you can't come right out and say what you mean I won't talk another word with you!

'Well, now,' Joe said gently, reaching for Volume I, 'I ain't trying to keep nothing back, Ann. I aim to speak right out, mostly. I don't want you to get riled at me, Ann. You see I ain't what you might call an old hand at this asking business; I thought maybe it would ease it up for me a little if I fetched the book along, to explain by. You see ——'

He pressed the book open and laid his brown finger on the page.

'You see,' he continued, 'this book is Volume I, and it starts off here with Red Sand and follers along with Pickety-Rough, and it goes right on with everything — with everything, a'most! Red Sand, Pickety-Rough, Clams, Mackerel Clouds — everything a man could think of, as you might say. Everything a body could ask a man about over on Fire Island Beach there. So to-day, along about dusk, I was settin' in my shack, and all of a sudden it come over me that it all wasn't no use!'

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'No use, Joe?' asked Ann gently, for he paused.

'No use!' Joe said. 'First day I didn't have a single fact to write down in my book. And I set there ——'

'You set there?'

'Thinkin',' said Joe. 'Maybe there wasn't any more facts to get. Maybe I was full up and complete. And twenty years at it! And there it was! You take a look at me, Ann; you can see yourself I ain't the sort ever to be elected President of the Village Corporation.'

'President?'

'I don't, do I? I don't look it, do I? I look like a clam-digger, or a beach-comber, or a sort of native, don't I? And one of them city men with a white yacht-cap is what they hanker for, ain't it? So it was all no use anyhow ——'

'What was?'

'Everything!' said Joe. 'Them twenty years and these here seventeen books and the facts; Red Sand and Pickety-Rough and the whole lot!'

Ann stared at him. She really thought the

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man was going to weep! She actually thought she saw a tear in his eye!

‘You want a handkerchief?’ she asked.

‘I got one here — somewheres,’ Joe said, and he felt in his pocket. He found it and blew his nose heartily, but Ann, after a first glance at the handkerchief, turned away her head until it was back in his pocket.

‘The first thing I buy that man,’ she thought, ‘if I’m fool enough to marry him, will be a dozen decent handkerchiefs — two dozen!’

‘Red Sand,’ Joe said, pointing to the first entry in Volume 1. ‘That’s what give me the notion. I was settin’ on the new dock over to the new incorporated village on Fire Island Beach twenty years ago about, and this new President of the Village come along and stood alongside of me with a man.

“‘President,” the man says, “I been for a walk down the beach just now and I wish you’d tell me why that red sand is all along shore, up nigh the weeds and not elsewhere.”

““Don’t know,” the President says.

““And another thing,” the man says. “Why

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is that section up yonder called Pickety-Rough?"

"Don't know as I've ever heard," says the President. "It's just called that, I guess."

'So I thought, "That's a nice sort of man to be President of the Village; can't answer the first questions a man puts at him!" So I thought: "I bet if I was President I'd be able to tell a man what he asked me or I'd be so ashamed I'd up and resign on the spot!" And then I thought, "Joe, why shouldn't you be President of this Village some day? It would be a fine sort of thing for you to be; it's a big honor for you to look forward to." And then I thought about the red sand. Blamed if I knew why that red sand was there!'

'But you found out,' suggested Ann.

'I did so!' said Joe. 'I went and looked and I went and asked, and I found out. And I asked about Pickety-Rough and I found out about it. And I said to myself, "Joe Deercomb, if you're going to be President of this Village on Fire Island Beach you've got to be able to answer what's asked. And when you know more about things than any other living

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soul they're bound to ask you to be President; you'll have earned it; you'll have worked up to it." And I ain't fitten for it, Ann. It come over me to-night, on a sudden, that I ain't fitten to be President of what the Village had growed to be. They wouldn't have me. If I was next to the last man over there they wouldn't want me!

Ann said nothing. There seemed to be nothing appropriate to say to a man whose twenty-year ambition had so suddenly died.

'And so,' said Joe, hesitating a little, 'I got blue, settin' there in my shack. It seemed so dumbd miserable to have worked twenty years gettin' ready to answer a million questions that would never be asked of me. It seemed so sort of un — so sort of unsuitable to have got ready to answer a million questions and not to have anybody to ask them. So, of a sudden ——'

'Sakes!' cried Ann. 'You don't expect me to ask you them million questions, do you?'

'Why, no,' said Joe with surprise. 'I never thought of that for a minute, Ann. I wouldn't expect you to. But it sort of come to me that

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if I was walkin' along the beach over there, or over the dunes, or through the pine rough, or anywhere, and there was a young lad — a little boy, as you might say — holding onto my hand —— Well, I've noticed there ain't hardly anything a little feller like that won't ask if ——'

Ann sat very still.

'If it's his father's hand he's got a-hold of,' said Joe Deercomb.

For another minute Ann sat quite still, then she arose.

'If you wait a minute, Joe,' she said, 'I've got close to a dozen men's size handkerchiefs upstairs that belonged to my father. I don't know but what you might as well be using them as them rotting to decay up there.'

When she came down with the handkerchiefs in her hand, Joe was still seated where she had left him. She put the handkerchiefs in his hand.

'If there's one thing in the world that any husband of mine has got to have,' she said briskly, 'it is nice handkerchiefs and enough of them.'

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'Yes'm; thank you,' said Joe.

'And when it comes to questions,' said Ann Carter, in an entirely amicable tone, 'I expect I asked more questions of my father when I was a little girl than any little boy ever asked.'

Joe Deercomb smiled with honest pride.

'She won't be able to ask me any that I can't answer, I'll warrant you!' he said.

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A BLOCK distant, in Harby's vacant lot, Ben stood close to the flat slab of stone that represented the home base and rapped it sharply with the end of his bat, his eyes hawklike on the hand of the pitcher.

'Throw it! Throw it, you cheese!' he shouted. 'Hit me on the beezer! You're afraid to throw it!'

He waggled his bat and rapped on the stone again, nervously alert. The pitcher looked over his shoulder at second base, glanced at third and first, wound up in true professional fashion and let Ben have his famous fast ball, straight over the base. As the ball left his hand the boy on third started for home and the two on first and second made rushes for the next bases. They counted on Ben; they usually could count on Ben. Ben's bat swung over his shoulder snappily and returned with all the strength of his muscular young arms and torso singing in its hickory.

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Mrs. Miller, sliding her stocking down the whiteness of the calf of her right leg, heard the smart smack of the bat against the ball and the instant burst of shouts and yells. She heard the momentary lull that came when the left-fielder extended his hands for the ball, and the wild yells when he muffed it. She heard the shrieks of 'Home, Ben! Home!' and the shouting when he threw himself into the dust and slid to touch the home base, and the mad yelling that always follows a close decision in a boys' game of baseball.

But she was not greatly interested. Her throat felt as if a dozen sharp hooks were grasping it inside, and when she swallowed there was an ugly pain at the back of her head, and — more than all — there was the beating pain in her eyes. She felt nauseated and weak. She had already gargled with salt water and had painted the back of her throat with argyrol. When she had dropped the last of her garments on the floor she sat on the edge of the bed a moment or two before she had strength to draw on her nightdress, and she paused again with her eyes closed before she took the

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pins from her hair and got between the sheets with a sigh.

The shades were drawn and the room was dusky and cool, and being in bed was a great relief. She closed her eyes and hoped she could fall asleep.

‘I hope I’m not going to be sick,’ she thought. ‘I hope I’ll be all right in the morning. I must try to be all right in the morning.’

For a few minutes she heard what sounds there were — a lawn-mower clicking somewhere near, the sparrows twittering, a street car squealing as it rounded a curve in the far distance, the voices of the boys on Harby’s lot, a hammer’s thud where a new house was being built somewhere near — then she fell asleep. Her last waking thought was that she would try to get up to get dinner for Ben and Joe, but even as she thought this she knew she would not get out of bed again that day. She knew she felt too utterly miserable. There was cold roast beef and plenty of bread and butter, and the cold rice if they cared to warm it, and the box of raspberries. Perhaps Joe could make coffee if he cared for it; if not there

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was cold near-beer and sarsaparilla in the ice box.

At six o'clock Ben, some of the dust knocked off his clothes by a few whacks with the flat of his hand, pushed open the front door and tossed his bat and his mitt in the corner, chucking his cap on top of them.

'Hey, mom!' he called, but there was no answer. He looked into the dining-room because his thoughts were of food, but the table was not set.

'Hey, mom!' he called again, and went to the kitchen. The kitchen was depressingly neat and tidy. With the dark shades down and the floor still damp from the mop, the kitchen was too pleasantly cool and dusky, like a cellar. He would have preferred to see it less neat, with the kitchen table covered with bowls and spoons and kitchen knives and tops of vegetables and pepper shakers and cut loaves of bread, and the gas range heating everything and, perhaps, something sputtering in a pan over the flame, and the coffee pot bubbling on the slow-burner.

'Aw, pshaw!' he said disgustedly and opened

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the ice box. He saw six cold sweet potatoes and took one. Eating it he went up the stairs. As he passed his mother's door she called to him.

'Benny!' she called in a voice that sounded faint and far away.

The voice gave him a slight momentary fright. He had thought his mother must be at a neighbor's or at one of her clubs — sometimes she came home saying the speaker had been interesting, but really did not seem to know when to stop.

'Yes'm?' he answered and stood by the door.

'Come in,' his mother said, and he went in.

'Come here,' she said, as he paused just inside the door. He walked to the bed slowly and his mother half turned and looked at him. He felt a little ashamed standing there and looking at her in bed. He could see her breasts through the lace of her nightdress and it made him not want to look at her, and he felt that something was pretty wrong that she did not seem to care and that she was so pale and that her hair was all hanging loose and every which way about her head on the pillow.

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‘Yes’m?’ he said nervously.

‘What time is it?’ she asked.

‘Why, it’s six o’clock, I guess. I guess it is. I guess it’s about that. Pretty near six o’clock.’

‘My throat is sore,’ his mother said. ‘I felt so weak, and my head ached, so I came to bed. I don’t think I’ll try to get up.’

‘Yes’m,’ Ben said.

‘You and your father can get yourselves something to eat. There’s the roast beef, and you can warm the rice, and there’s the box of raspberries. The butter’s in the lower part of the refrigerator. You know where the bread is.’

‘Yes’m,’ Ben said.

‘Your father’s not home yet?’

‘No’m,’ Ben said.

His mother turned away from him again.

‘You might close the door when you go out,’ she said.

Ben moved to the door. Just before he closed it he paused a moment. He cleared his throat; for some reason there was a lump in it. He cleared it twice.

‘I — I hope you’ll feel all right,’ he said in a

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voice that was so husky he did not recognize it as his own, and then he went out hastily and closed the door because he had a feeling that he was going to cry if he tried to say any more. He went to the bathroom and washed his hands and face. He washed himself unusually well. He let the bowl run full of hot water instead of washing briefly while the water ran from the faucet, and he used the soap lavishly. He rolled up his sleeves and washed to his elbows — at least on the upper parts of his arms. He unbuttoned his shirt at the neck and soaped his face. He even washed his neck and his ears.

‘Hey-oh! Hello, everybody!’ his father called as Ben was still wrestling with the towel.

Ben went to the head of the stairs.

‘Mother’s sick,’ he said hoarsely.

‘What! What say?’ Mr. Miller demanded, stopping his hand on its way to hang up his hat.

‘Mother’s sick,’ Ben repeated. ‘She went to bed.’

‘No! Why ——’ Ben’s father exclaimed. He frowned. ‘Now, that’s a shame.’

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He went up the stairs and tapped gently on the door and entered. His wife turned her head and smiled at him, and he bent and kissed her.

‘What is it, Anna?’ he asked. ‘I’m sorry you feel sick.’

‘I don’t think it is much, Joe,’ she said, putting out her hand for him to take. ‘My throat is sore — a touch of tonsillitis, maybe — and my head ached and I felt miserable, so I came to bed. I think I may be all right in the morning. I think I can sleep it off.’

‘You don’t think you had better see a doctor?’

‘No, not to-night, Joe. If I don’t feel better in the morning ——’

‘There’s nothing you’d like?’

‘No. You’ll have to try to find something for yourself and Ben to eat; I don’t feel like getting up.’

‘Oh, we’ll manage all right!’

‘Yes. There’s the cold beef in the ice box and the butter is in the lower part, behind the milk bottles, and you can warm the rice for Ben if he wants it. There’s plenty of bread.

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There's a box of berries in the upper part of the ice box, at the right. You can try to make some coffee if you want.'

'Oh, we'll manage! We'll get along fine and dandy.'

'Don't try to set the table, it will just make work for you — you can eat in the kitchen.'

'We'll be all right. And how about you, Anna? Wouldn't you like something?'

'No, I don't think so, Joe. I may be able to get up and make myself some tea a little later if I feel like wanting it, but all I want now is to rest here. I think I'll be all right by morning. I don't think it is anything much.'

He stood a moment or two, wishing he could do something, but not knowing what or how, for men are always ill at ease in a sick-room, and she dismissed him as she had dismissed Ben.

'When you go out you might close the door,' she said. 'I'll try to sleep again.'

He found Ben at the foot of the stairs, and the boy looked up at him questioningly.

'Is she very sick?' Ben asked.

'Well, I'm no doctor, son,' Joe said, giving

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the boy a pat on the shoulder, 'but she thinks it is nothing but a sore throat. She don't want the doctor. Let's rustle up some grub, shall we?'

They went to the kitchen and Joe raised the shades and opened one of the windows.

'Open the back door, Ben, and let's let a little air through here,' he said, and he opened the door of the ice box and took out the big platter on which the roast beef stood in congealed gravy. 'This looks good to a hungry man,' he said, 'how does it look to you? Do you know where the carver is?'

The boy opened the drawer of the kitchen table.

'Is this it?' he asked.

'No, that's what she cuts the bread with,' his father said. 'Look in one of the drawers in the dining-room — the knife with the stag-horn handle. And get a couple of plates, will you, son? And some knives and forks and a couple of spoons.'

The boy brought all these, and a cup and saucer, too.

'Well, yes,' his father said. 'I might make

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some coffee while I'm about it. Let me see — where does she keep the coffee?'

'It's in a can in the cupboard,' Ben said. 'I'll get it.'

'This rice, now,' said Joe. 'I wonder what's the proper way to heat it? I wonder if you put it in a frying-pan, or something?'

'I don't know,' Ben admitted.

'It sort of seems as if that would fry it up,' said Joe. 'Maybe if we put it in the oven, dish and all, it would be better. Do you know how to light this oven?'

'I guess you turn this one on and then put a match in here and then turn the other ones on,' Ben said. 'If it pops you turn it out and do it again.'

'Where does your mother put the coffee in this kind of a coffee pot?' Joe asked a minute later.

'It goes in that thing with the holes in it,' Ben said. It was surprising how much he knew, in a loose sort of way, about the kitchen things and how much, in an equally loose sort of way, he did not know. He did not know how much coffee to put in the pot, nor how much water,

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but he knew exactly where the pepper box was. This was because he spent quite a little time in the kitchen with his mother. He ate there at noon, coming home from school, and he hung about the kitchen quite a little while she was getting dinner, talking with her, sometimes shelling a few peas or doing this or that small thing.

He had a warm and pleasant feeling somewhere to be getting dinner in this chummy way with his father, but just under it was a sort of wavy feeling, as if he could cry without much trouble. This was partly because his father spoke in such a cheery, chummy way and partly because the kitchen was strangely vacant and unlike itself without his mother in it. It was not like their kitchen. It was like being in some deserted kitchen and trying to be cheerful about it. He did not talk much. If his mother had been getting dinner he would have told her of knocking a home run and letting in three other runs, and she would have said, 'Why, Ben, how splendid — hand me that spoon!' — which was all that could be expected from a mother, mothers not knowing

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much about baseball; but he did not feel like telling his father. He had an intuition that his father would make too much of it and be too joyful over it and that one shouldn't be so joyful when mother was sick in bed upstairs.

'There, now!' Joe exclaimed, when he had taken the rice from the oven, handling the bowl carefully with a towel, and the coffee was spurting in the pot. 'I'll say that's some dinner for two helpless men to get! You sit there, son. Dig in.'

His father talked quite a lot as they ate, in a cheerful sort of way that, somehow, seemed not quite sincere — a little too much as if he was trying to be cheerful. He asked what Ben had been doing, and dug into the ball game's lesser details in a way no father ever digs normally. They both were aware they were making talk, and Ben felt shy. They both felt shy, so they ate far more than usual, with 'Have another piece of bread, son?' and 'Well, all right; I guess so,' and 'This rice seems sort of cold when you get toward the middle of it, don't it?' and 'Yes, I guess so; it's all right, I guess.'

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'I do hope your mother's not going to be sick,' Joe said once, serious and frowning.

'Yes, sir,' Ben said and choked on his bread.

At length they could eat no more and Joe pushed back his plate and for a moment looked out of the window.

'I think I'll just run up and see if there's anything your mother wants,' he said, and pushed back his chair. He went toward the door. 'I wonder if she wouldn't like some ice cream, Ben? How'd you like to chase up to the store on your wheel and get a pint of cream?'

'All right! Yes!' Ben exclaimed eagerly, his eyes brightening.

'You know what kind she likes?'

'Yes, strawb'ry,' said Ben as eagerly.

Joe put his hand in his pocket.

'I got some money ——' Ben said.

'No, here's —— Well, all right, then,' said Joe. 'Don't waste any time on the way back, but look out when you cross the avenue, son.' But Ben was already on his way. He wasted no time either going or coming. He did not sit on the seat of his bicycle at all, but wove from pedal to pedal, making the bicycle fairly jump.

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He entered the kitchen with his face beamingly proud. He had never made such time to the store and back.

‘She says we can make her some tea and toast,’ Joe said as Ben put the paper bag on the table. ‘You get that tray from the dining-room, son.’

‘Do you know how to make tea?’ Ben asked.

‘I asked her,’ confessed Joe. ‘I’ve got the kettle boiling already. You boil the water and then fill the teapot half full and put a teaspoonful of tea in it. I always thought there was a lot more to making tea than that. Is this the teapot?’

‘Yes, that’s it.’

‘She ought to have a better teapot than this; we’ll get her one, Ben. Do you know where she keeps the tea?’

‘Yes, it’s in that gray jar. I’ll get it.’

‘All right; put a spoonful of tea in the pot, will you?’

Joe was slicing the bread for the toast. He lighted the oven again and laid the toast on the bars, pressing it firmly down with the bread-knife, standing watch over it. Ben measured a

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spoonful of tea — honest full measure — and put it in the pot.

‘There’s one thing about this toast,’ his father said; ‘we’ve got plenty of bread and if the first don’t turn out right we can do some more. How does mother like it, do you know — crisp or soft?’

‘I should think she’d like it soft, if she’s got a sore throat,’ the boy said.

‘That’s right! And, say — see if you can’t find a napkin or something to spread on the tray. And get a couple of little dishes; we want one for the ice cream, and we’ll take up a dish of raspberries. They ought to go fine with the ice cream.’

‘Maybe I could ’a’ got raspb’ry,’ said Ben.

‘I guess that don’t matter,’ said his father. ‘Have you got a knife and fork? Or, hold on — she won’t want a knife and fork. Three spoons. We’ll butter the toast down here. Get a clean napkin, Ben.’

Joe turned the toast. The one side was done to a delicious brown.

‘What you looking for?’ he asked, for Ben was rummaging in the ice box.

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'Some cream,' said Ben.

'Well, come now!' said Joe. 'I thought you knew better than that, Ben. Your mother don't take cream in her tea.'

'I know that, don't I?' Ben asked. 'I wasn't getting it for her tea. I was getting it for her raspb'rys, if she wanted to eat them that way.'

'Well, that's a good idea, too,' admitted Joe. 'The cream's there on the table where I was using it for my coffee. Only how about putting it in a pitcher? That little pitcher with the flowers on it. Look sort of better for a sick lady, wouldn't it?'

Ben got the little pitcher and wiped its interior carefully with a clean spot on the hand-towel and put the cream in it. He found a small saucer-shaped dish and put a dozen lumps of sugar on it. Mr. Miller peeked under the toast and hurriedly poured boiling water into the teapot and hastened back to the toast. He hastened one piece to the kitchen table and went back to attend to the rest. Ben put the tray napkin on the tray and put the spoons and the cream and sugar on it, with the tea-

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pot beside them. He got a cup and saucer and put them on the tray. The tray was beginning to look like something.

It was very sweet and satisfying to be there in the kitchen with his father, getting ready a tray for his mother who was sick. They were like two gentle conspirators, trying to please her. His father buttered the toast, but the butter was hard and he shook his head over it. They talked about that a moment and then had a great thought — if they put the toast on a plate and put the plate in the oven a minute the plate would be warm and the butter would melt, and it would be much better.

‘We’ve got to keep the toast and the teapot at the other side from the ice cream,’ Joe said, ‘so it won’t melt. And I tell you — get a glass for some water and I’ll crack a piece of ice for it.’

‘Shall I put the ice cream in a dish?’ asked Ben.

‘No, hold on a minute,’ said Joe. ‘We’ll do that the last thing. And I’ll tell you what! Put that saucer on top of the ice in the ice box and get it cool; then she won’t melt so fast.’

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‘It looks pretty good,’ Ben said, when the tray was all loaded, except for the ice cream. ‘Think we’ve forgotten anything?’

They went over the tray carefully. The toast was there, the tea was there, the raspberries and the cream were there, there was sugar and napkin and silver.

‘I could — I could get, now, maybe, a couple of flowers,’ suggested Ben diffidently.

‘Yes — you do that,’ said Joe. ‘You hustle out and get two or three of those roses from the garden, and I’ll fill a glass to put them in, and by that time that saucer on the ice will be cold enough.’

‘I got four colors,’ Ben said when he returned with the roses, and Joe arranged them in the glass. Then they emptied the ice cream into its saucer, and it was beautiful in its rosiness above the white tray napkin.

‘That looks pretty good,’ said Joe, meaning the tray. He took it carefully in his two hands and the ice in the tumbler jingled pleasantly. For some reason he could not understand Ben wanted to cry, more than he had wanted to cry for years. He did not know why.

INTERLUDE

'I'll wait down here,' he ventured.

'No, you come up and open the door for me,' said Joe, and Ben went ahead, the jingling ice in the tumbler following him cautiously step by step. He rapped on the door and his mother said 'Come!' and he could hear her turning in the bed, and when he opened the door she was leaning on one elbow.

'We brought you some supper,' he said.

'Oh, how nice! How pretty!' his mother said. 'And ice cream! Why, you dear thoughtful boy! I did want some ice cream!'

'We thought perhaps you could eat a little something,' said Joe. 'Ben thought of the flowers.'

'They're lovely! Will you raise one of the shades, Ben?'

Joe put the tray on a chair while he helped her up in the bed and put a pillow behind her; then he put the tray on her knees and the ice in the tumbler jingled pleasantly. Joe poured the tea.

'Is the tea about right?' he asked.

'Just right,' she said, and the lump in Ben's chest swelled again.

INTERLUDE

His mother made a wry face as she sipped the tea.

‘It’s my throat,’ she said. ‘It hurts when I swallow,’ and then she realized how awkward her two men were, as they stood there, and guessed that they were feeling as men feel in a sick-room. ‘I don’t think you need wait,’ she said. ‘I’m going to have to take this very slowly. There’s everything here I need. I think you’re wonderful, both of you, fixing up a tray such as this. You can leave the door open when you go out.’

‘Yes,’ Joe said. ‘Ben and I have to do some dish-washing; hey, Ben?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Ben said, and grinned.

‘Well, you can both kiss me. Not on the mouth! Now, go!’

They went downstairs and into the kitchen again. There were not many dishes, but they spent quite awhile over them. They washed and wiped whatever was to be washed and wiped, and put everything away, and brushed the floor and closed the door and the window and drew the shades. Then Joe went up for the tray and brought it down. Half the berries

INTERLUDE

and half the toast had been eaten and practically all of the ice cream. The teapot was much depleted of contents. That was fine, but Ben looked at his father mutely.

‘She says she feels better,’ Joe said, ‘but I think she has a little fever. She’s going to sleep now. I’ll sleep with you to-night, I guess, so she’ll be more comfortable.’

‘Yes; all right,’ Ben said.

‘If she’s no better in the morning we’ll have that doctor, and no nonsense about it,’ said Joe.

‘Yes, sir,’ Ben agreed.

They sat awhile on the veranda — as they called the front porch — and Joe smoked. Now and then he went upstairs quietly, and each time, when he came down again, he said she was asleep.

‘I think you’d better get to bed, Ben,’ he said presently. ‘I’ll have a couple of more looks at your mother, and then I’ll turn in, too.’

‘Yes, sir; well, good-night,’ Ben said, and kissed his father and went up. He felt lonely and strange, and when he was in bed he cried

INTERLUDE

a little — he did not know why, exactly — and then began a long sort of prayer that was pretty much all the same thing and the same words, that mother would be well in the morning, dear God, and he fell asleep thinking the prayer.

He awakened in the morning with a start, hearing a noise for which he could not account, and sat up in bed. His father, his back toward him, was sleeping like a log. From below, in the kitchen, Ben heard the sound again — a loud pop, and then the noise of flaring gas jets. He slid out of bed and went down the hall and looked into his mother's room. Her bed was empty and her underclothes no longer lay on the floor. He went to the head of the stairs and there he could hear his mother moving about in the kitchen. He drew a deep involuntary breath and his mother came from the kitchen and opened the front door. As she turned, she saw him standing at the top of the stairs.

‘My goodness, Ben — go back to bed! You can sleep another hour yet,’ she said, and smiled at him.

INTERLUDE

‘Are you — are you pretty well this morning?’ Ben asked.

‘Ever so much better!’

As he slid into bed his father awakened and raised his head.

‘What is it?’ he asked, frightened.

‘Nothing,’ Ben said. ‘Everything’s all right. Mother’s well again.’

THE CRISIS



THE CRISIS

OLD SAM WILKINS was having one of his tantrums, and this time he was in earnest and was building himself a raft. 'By hecky, when I get this here raft builded!' he scolded to himself as he worked on it, for he was sick of things. There was too much talk and too much bossing. 'By hecky, when I get this here raft builded!' he threatened, with none but the ducks to hear him. He knelt on the raft, nailing a crumpled sheet of tin roofing to the floor of the raft in front of the rude shack he had built on the raft. The piece of tin roofing was to build a fire on when he needed one. It was the finishing touch; when he had the tin in place the raft would be complete. Old man Wilkins drove a nail into the sheet of tin and felt around for another nail and could find none, so he swore a little with irritation and waded ashore through the mud and walked across the drier land to the decayed buggy where he had left his can of nails.

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The raft was crude and the shack on it was even cruder, for Old Wilkins had never been any hand at carpentry; he had always been a farmer. The shack on the raft was built of four uprights chosen at random from the pile of waste lumber. They were braced by strips of wood nailed from their tops to the floor of the raft; the top and sides were of tar paper.

Already Old Wilkins had a good pile of split pine wood aboard for cooking purposes, and a frying pan and some salt and such dishes and utensils as he thought he might need, and his bamboo fish pole. He also had an old quilt and quite a pile of corn husks to make his bed. He had also four stout stakes and a long pole. The stakes were to anchor the raft at its four corners, and the pole was to propel the raft.

Old Wilkins picked up his can of nails and started toward the raft again, but he remembered his shoes and socks which he had left in the box of the old buggy and he turned back and got them, for there was no use making another trip. The raft would be ready when he had nailed that tin down.

As Old Wilkins waded back to the raft, his

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face bore the same sour and vindictive look it had worn for some weeks. He groaned a little as he bent his old knees in getting down to finish his nailing. He had to use his left hand to steady himself as he used the hammer, and he put his hand on the small of his back as he straightened up, and groaned again. Not so young any more! He had to stand a moment to let the kinks get out of his muscles, but he wasted no more time than that. He picked up the long pole and set its end against the mushy shore and pushed. The end of the pole went deep into the mud and the mud grasped it and clung to it. Old Wilkins drew back and jerked at the pole like a robin pulling at an unyielding worm.

‘Blame take ye!’ he scolded and jerked still harder. The whole raft shook.

There was no current to help Old Wilkins, for this body of water was a pond. It was a pond covering two acres or more, fed by a mere trickle of stream. The bottom of the pond was mud, and the banks were mud. The pond was called Wilkins’ Pond because it was on his farm and he had made it and he owned it. It lay in what was little more than low waves of land,

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with weeds and sedges in it and on its edges. There were carp in the pond, because Old Wilkins had planted them there, and they could be caught with worms or with dough balls jiggled up and down, but the pond was as unattractive as any body of water could be.

Old Wilkins had made the pond many years before; building a five-foot dirt dam where two hillocks came close together, driving a few planks at the sluice at the middle of the dam so that, if necessary, the pond could be drained. The planks were now overgrown with moss and hidden in tall weeds.

Where the raft lay stuck in the mud the ground was bare, for it was here the cows waded in and the ducks and geese waddled down for their swims. The muddy shore ran back to the two big barns, beyond which were the other farm buildings and the house, all but one window of the house hidden from the raft. Cornstalk fodder was trampled into the mud, and against the barns was the accumulation of farm trash — old sleighs, waste lumber, and decaying boxes.

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Old Wilkins, talking hard words to the mud that grasped his pushing pole, was pulling jerkily but ineffectively at the pole, trying to get it out of the mud, when a second old man came around the end of the barn nearest the raft, looked at Wilkins a moment and then walked toward him.

‘Hi, Sam! Hi, wait a minute!’ he called, waving his staff. ‘Hold on there a minute! Want to see you!’

For answer Old Wilkins jerked at the pole more violently. He jerked half a dozen times and the pole came out of the mud suddenly and Old Wilkins sat down as suddenly, the end of the pole striking the tar-paper roof of his shack and going right on through.

‘Blame blast ye!’ he shouted. ‘Now look what you gone and made me do, hollerin’ at me like I was deaf and blind! You ain’t got no sense, and you never did have no sense. Get away from me and let me alone. Go home; I don’t want nothin’ to do with you.’

‘Why, Sam!’ the other old man expostulated. ‘What I done? I didn’t do nothin’.’

‘You get away from me,’ Wilkins cried.

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'Snoopin' around where you ain't no business to be. You get away.'

Nicholas Wilhelm looked at his neighbor with amazement. He was a chunky old man, square built, with a big round face and innocent blue eyes. He wore a reddish beard that began at his ears, leaving his face clean, but fluffing out under his jaws and chin. It gave him a curious appearance of having poked his face through a piece of buffalo robe, thus giving him a doubly playful and harmless look. He had known Sam Wilkins ever since they had been schoolboys together, and he had seen him peevish often enough to be callous to such exhibitions of temper. Now he came as close to the raft as the mud permitted and stared at Sam.

'You got a raft,' he said pleasantly.

'None of your business what I got,' said Sam bitterly. 'You mind your business and I'll mind mine.'

'Goin' to fish from it?' Nick inquired pleasantly.

For answer Sam pushed the pole into the mud again. He leaned his whole weight on it

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this time, and it went deeper into the mud than before and clung there tighter. Then he pulled at it.

'Sort of stuck in the mud, ain't it?' asked Nicholas.

'You mind your business!' said Sam.

'Wife said she thought you was down here somewheres,' said Nick, as if he was imparting the gladdest of tidings in which Sam should be much interested if not delighted.

'I ain't got no wife,' said Sam.

'Hey?' inquired Nick Wilhelm.

'You hear what I say? I ain't got no wife! I'm done with folks. From now on I ain't got no wife, and I ain't got no relations, and I don't want to have nothing to do with nobody! That's what I built this here raft for, if you want to know. I'm goin' to get rid of the whole kit and boilin' of them.'

'Goin' fishin'?' asked Nick.

'No, I ain't goin' fishin'!' Sam answered, mocking him. 'I ain't goin' nowheres. I'm goin' to stay right here on this raft. I'm blame blasted sick of this world and of all the folks in it, and I'm goin' to get rid of it.'

THE CRISIS

'Well, now, how you goin' to do that, Samuel?' asked Nick with much interest.

'I'm goin' to maroon it — that's how I'm goin' to do it, blame blast it!' declared Samuel, resting a moment against his pole. 'It don't need to think I care a hang for it. It can go and dry up and bust for all I care. I'm goin' to be quit of it. Soon's I can get this pole loose again I'm goin' to put it against the whole blame earth yonder and push it away from me.'

'You mean you're goin' to push yourself out yonder into the middle of the pond, Sam?' asked Nick.

'No, I don't mean nothin' of the kind,' snapped Sam. 'I wouldn't give a blame blasted world like the one you're standin' on the satisfaction of thinkin' I cared enough for it to pole away from it. I'm goin' to push it away from me, and let it rot if it wants to, that's what I'm goin' to do. Goin' to maroon it, blame blast it!'

This, at the moment, seemed considerable of a brag, seeing that the old man's pushing pole was still held in the mud as if iron jaws had gripped it.

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'Well, I shouldn't wonder if you'd have a real good time,' said Nick cheerfully. 'How long you goin' to maroon us?'

'Forever, blame blast it!' said Sam. 'I ain't never goin' to rescue you. You can all go to Sam Hill for all I care. I'm done with the lot of you.'

'Ain't you liable to starve to death?' asked Nick with some concern.

'If I do, I won't be nothin' but dead,' said Sam angrily.

'Of course you can fish some,' Nick suggested. 'They ought to be plenty of carp in the pond. Nigger food, I call 'em, but some likes 'em. Sort of taste muddy to me. You take along in the summer, when a carp softens up and gets its belly full of mud, and I wouldn't eat one for a dollar. No, sir ——'

'They don't lie and cheat and cuss and swear, that's one thing,' declared Sam, glaring at his old friend. 'They don't come around where they ain't wanted and then jaw a man's ears off. They don't marry you and then raise hail if you happen to come into the kitchen once in forty years with your boots on. They

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don't take to runnin' your farm for you and then go hintin' at you that you're a played-out old back-number that ain't no good now and never was no good, blame blast 'em!

'Does your wife know you're goin' to maroon her and all this way, Sam?' Nicholas asked.

'No, she don't,' said Sam briefly.

'Don't suppose you've told your sons or Emmy, either, have you?'

'No, I ain't,' said Sam with extreme sourness.

'Because I don't 'magine they'd let you if they did know,' said Nicholas.

'Let?' cried Sam. 'They can let or they cannot let. I'm a man of full age, and I'll do what I'm a mind to.'

Nicholas Wilhelm, looking past his old friend and over the placid surface of the pond, felt a great regret that Sam Wilkins had decided to maroon the world and all its people in this way. For seventy years, more or less, Sam Wilkins had been his neighbor and friend — enemy at times — and he hated to lose him now that life had so few years left for them.

Nick Wilhelm did not have much imagina-

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tion, but even the little he had was sufficient to let him picture Sam sitting out there on his raft in the middle of the pond fishing for carp. He could see the raft, staked at its four corners, and Sam pulling in a carp, scaling it, gutting it, cooking it on the tin and eating it mud and all, and then catching another carp and another carp, and getting fuller and fuller of mud himself, and madder, and more bilious, and more cantankerous. And by that time the Board of Supervisors would send out the health doctor, and by the time he had seen Sam eat a couple of hundred fried carp and had heard him ramp and rave and carry on, they would declare Sam to be plumb crazy and take him away and lock him up. And he would hate to lose Sam. Sam had been a rough talker for pretty near three-quarters of a century, but he had been like pepper and mustard and vinegar to Nick. Nicholas looked toward the barns wistfully. Fortune favored him, for he saw Jabe Wilkins, Sam's younger son, open the rear door of one of the barns and push a long-legged calf into the open. Nicholas waved to him to come. Sam had wrapped his arms around his pushing

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pole and was jouncing on it with all his weight.

'What you got against the world and all, Sam?' Nicholas asked to hide his betrayal.

'There ain't nothin' to it,' said Sam sourly. 'It don't come to nothin' worth a shuck. You take folks ——'

'Goats, did you say?' asked Nicholas.

'No, blame blast you! I said folks!' Sam shouted. 'A man can eat goats if he's got to. Folks, I said. What good are they? They started off with Adam and Eve, and what did it amount to? They was folks, and by and by they give birth to more, and they give birth to more, and by the time the blame blasted thing went on awhiles Adam and Eve was dead — and what did it amount to? Dyin' off at one end as fast as they was born on at the other! And what does it all come to?'

'Well, now, Samuel,' said Nicholas slowly, because he could'n see what it did come to exactly.

'And these here religions,' said Sam sourly. 'Been havin' 'em since the sun was a pup, and soon's one is born t'other dies off — world without end, amen — and a nigger'd just as

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soon steal a chicken now as he ever would. The's been religions thirty billion years, and a man's old woman will howl his head off if he comes into the kitchen with his boots on just the same as in the beginnin'. Huh!'

There was something wrong with this, Nicholas knew, but before he could think what it was, Sam was at it again.

'This here politics,' he said scornfully. 'One rascal out and another rascal in, and all any of 'em can think of is to rig up some sort of taxes, blame blast 'em, and that's the way it's been since Adam, and that's the way it'll be till sun freezes over. A man eats to-day, and he gets hungry again right away. Get over one spell o' sickness and get into another, and in the end of it he dies and nothin' can stop him. Fellers invent automobyles to get around quick in and whang into trees and don't git nowhere. Since the world started there ain't been nothin' but trouble and sin and meanness ——'

The pole came out of the mud again, and when Sam looked up he saw his son Jabe and his little grandson Sammy coming toward the raft from the barns.

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‘Blame blast it!’ he exclaimed. ‘Now Jabe’ll have to shoot his mouth off!’

‘What you tryin’ to do, pa?’ Jabe asked, sure enough, when he neared the raft.

‘Wat cha try’n’ do, damp?’ little Sammy asked.

‘None your business, none o’ you!’ said old Sam. ‘You get away from here and leave me alone.’

‘He’s soured on us,’ explained Nick Wilhelm. ‘He’s built this raft here, and he’s goin’ to maroon himself out yonder in the lake, like a hermit, and never come to shore no more.’

Jabe lifted one edge of his felt hat and wrinkled his forehead and scratched his head thoughtfully.

‘Livin’ on carp,’ explained Nick. ‘He’ll be dead in a week, the old skeezer.’

Jabe looked troubled. He was the gentle member of the family, and he had never had much control over his father.

‘Sammy, you run up to the house and tell grandma that grandpa is on a raft and goin’ out to the middle of the pond to stay there,’ he said to the boy, and Sammy ran off as fast

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as his short legs could carry him. 'Now, pa, there ain't any sense for you to act this way,' he added.

'There ain't no sense in nothin',' said old Sam Wilkins. 'I'm done with it. Man works all his life to lay up a couple of dollars, and all that happens to it is it gets spent. If one don't spend it, another one does. Folks been workin' their fool heads off since Adam to pile up money, and what's come of it? All spent!'

'Yours ain't spent,' said Jabe.

''Twill be,' said old Sam. 'Hundred years from now, th' won't be a blame blasted cent of it left nowheres.'

Jabe looked toward the barns. He felt inadequate to contest the proposition that all money eventually went the way of all flesh and all grass, and he longed for his mother to come. She could handle the old man — usually. But instead of Ma Wilkins he saw Emmy coming, with her ten-year-old daughter Susie, and Martha, Jabe's wife. Behind them came Mona, who was Henry's wife, and Alura, the hired help. Behind them came Oscar, the hired man, and young Sammy.

THE CRISIS

'Ma won't come,' Emmy said. 'What's pa up to now?'

'He's gone and built him this raft,' Jabe said, 'and he's goin' to shove off to the middle of the pond and stay there, near as I can make out.'

'He's goin' to do no such thing!' said Emmy promptly. 'Pa, you come off that raft this minute! You hear me?'

'What's he doin'?' asked Martha.

'Land knows!' Emmy said. 'Goin' to build him a house in the middle of the pond, near as I can make out.'

'What's grandpa doing, Aunt Martha?' asked Susie.

'Building him a house in the middle of the pond,' said Martha. 'He might as well be a muskrat and be done with it!'

'What's the matter?' asked Mona, arriving too late to hear the explanation.

'Why, grandpa thinks he's a muskrat, and he's built himself a house in the middle of the pond, and he's going to live in it,' Susie explained.

'Under water?' asked Mona.

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'Yes, I guess so. I should think he'd get drowned, wouldn't you?'

'I never heard of such a crazy idea!' declared Mona.

'What's he doin'?' asked Alura, the hired help.

'He found a muskrat house out in the middle of the pond, and he's goin' out to drowned himself in it,' Mona explained.

'What's happenin'?' inquired Oscar, his eyes big.

'It's Mr. Wilkins,' Alura told him. 'He tried to drowned himself in a muskrat house out in the pond. I guess he's goin' to try it again. Ain't it awful?'

'What'd he build the raft for?' Oscar asked.

'To drowned himself from, I guess,' Alura thought.

'He ain't goin' to drowned himself,' Nicholas Wilhelm said. 'He's goin' to starve to death. Eatin' carp. He's goin' to eat them mud-bellied carp and catch typhoid fever, that's what he's goin' to do.'

'What'd Mr. Wilhelm say?' asked Mona.

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'He says grandpa's got typhoid fever,' Susie explained.

'What's that?' asked Jabe, catching the name of the dread disease.

'He's got typhoid fever and it's gone to his head,' said Mona.

'He ought to be in bed,' said Alura. 'Can't nobody do nothin' to stop him?'

Oscar placed little Sammy's hand in Alura's. It was time somebody did something, for old Sam had found a solid purchase for his pushing pole — some root or board — and he had moved the raft an inch or, if his thought is preferred, he had pushed the world an inch away from the raft.

'C'mon, Jabe,' Oscar called. 'You tackle him from that side, and I'll tackle him from this. Look careful; these typhoids are dangerous when they're out of their heads. Wait till I say "go," and then rush in on him.'

But old Sam was not to be rushed. He grasped his pushing pole and swung it in a half circle, a dangerous weapon.

'You get away and let me be,' he commanded. 'I'll bash your blame blasted heads in.'

THE CRISIS

'We ought to get the old lady,' said Oscar, backing away a step. 'She's the only one he'd pay any attention to. You go, Susie, and tell her to come right down here. Tell her the boss has got typhoid fever and has built him a raft and thinks he's a muskrat and is goin' out to the middle of the pond and drowned himself. Hurry up, now; he's liable to go and do it any minute.'

They stood in a group beyond the reach of the pushing pole and watched him laboring to push the unattractive world away while Susie ran toward the house. The raft moved another inch.

'You ain't goin' to enjoy them carps, Sam; I tell you that now,' warned Nicholas Wilhelm. 'They're goin' to pall on you mighty quick.'

'Let 'em pall,' said old Sam, pushing hard. 'You always did think too much of your food; and if I ever did I'm past it. What's it all amount to? Lot o' fool women cookin' up stuff to keep a man alive so he can work himself to death for them, and when he's et a lot he goes and dies anyway. No more sense to it than a carp eatin' mud. I'm done with food.'

THE CRISIS

Emmy, who was tender-hearted, began to cry, and she was wiping her eyes on her apron when Susie returned, running as before.

'Now, grandma says,' she panted, 'she ain't got time for, now, foolishness.'

'But — ' Jabe began, and then, as the raft moved another inch under the violent urging of old Sam, he started for the house on the run. At the corner of the barn he met Henry, and they saw him telling Henry, gesturing toward the raft and the pond, giving him the whole story. They returned together, Henry walking in his usual slow and steady way, and Mona ran to meet them, and she, too, told the story of the disaffection of old Sam.

'Yes,' Henry said calmly, 'Jabe told me that.'

'But you got to do something,' Mona urged. 'He's getting the raft away, and he'll drowned himself like a muskrat. Hurry up, Henry. He's got the worst kind of typhoid fever, and he don't know what he's doing.'

'He ain't got typhoid fever no more than nothin',' said Nicholas Wilhelm. 'He's goin' to stake down the raft out yonder and starve to death on mud-bellied carp.'

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‘And Mona says he’s been out once and tried to drowned himself ——’

‘I didn’t say so,’ said Mona. ‘Susie told me he built himself a house under water like a muskrat, and he’s going out to live in it ——’

‘Why, I never said anything of the kind, Aunt Mona!’ Susie cried. ‘All I said was that he had built himself a house in the middle of the pond like a muskrat’s house, like Aunt Martha told me ——’

‘I didn’t tell you that, Susie,’ Martha said. ‘Emmy told me he was building him a house in the middle of the pond ——’

‘Why, Martha!’ exclaimed Emmy. ‘I only said Jabe told me pa might be going to build him a house in the middle of the pond, and ——’

‘I did not!’ declared Jabe. ‘I said he had built him a raft and was going out to the middle of the pond to stay ——’

Henry pushed to the front. ‘Pa,’ he said pleasantly, ‘you come off that raft and behave like a human bein’. If you’d clean your boots before you go into the kitchen, ma wouldn’t jaw you. Quit this here nonsense now and

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come up to the house and eat your dinner. Will you?’

‘I won’t!’ said old Sam, and he placed his pushing pole against the solid foundation he had found and bore against it. The raft moved a full two inches.

Without emotion and at his usual sturdy pace, Henry walked away from the group. He walked around the edge of the pond until he came to the dam and, bracing himself well, he pulled down first one and then another of the decayed planks that held back the water of the pond. With a rush the imprisoned water poured through the gap, and Henry walked slowly back. Inch by inch the heavy raft settled into the slime of the pond bottom.

But old Sam did not notice this immediately. The gentle breeze, bearing past the end of the farther barn, had crossed the intervening space and reached his nose, and he raised his nose in the air and whiffed the odor of hot yellow corn bread, crisply browned on top and around the edges. He opined soft yellow butter and sorghum molasses, and he second-sighted his wife drawing the pan of corn bread

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out of the oven. His tongue came out of his mouth and ran along the edge of one lip and then along the edge of the other. He looked behind him and saw the far edge of his raft settling into the ooze of the rapidly sinking pond, and he put down his pole and picked up his shoes and stockings.

‘You better stay to dinner, Nicholas,’ he said; ‘ma’s cooked corn bread.’

‘I guess maybe I will, then, Sam,’ said Nick Wilhelm; ‘she’s good at it.’

There is one good thing about carp: they can live comfortably in the mud.

THE END

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